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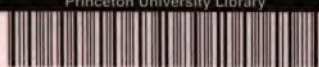
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To, The Editor of the
Evangelical Mag?

A
COMPARATIVE VIEW
OF THE
Presbyterian, Congregational,
AND
Independent,
FORMS OF
CHURCH GOVERNMENT;
BEING
AN ATTEMPT TO TRACE OUT THE PRIMITIVE MODE,
FROM SCRIPTURE AND ANTIQUITY.



PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

BY
JOSEPH TURNBULL, B.A.

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL, AND CLASSICAL TUTOR OF
WYMONDLEY ACADEMY.

“ Be ye followers of me, even as I am of Christ. Now I praise
you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the
ordinances, as I delivered them to you.” I Cor. xi. 1, 2.

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1821.

P R E F A C E.

AFTER the world has been oppressed with so many volumes on the subject of church-government, and after such disgust has been manifested by many, on account of the endless controversies in which the subject is involved, it would be almost hopeless to expect any considerable share of attention to the contents of the following pages. Feeling, however, a deep interest in the subject, I have studied it with some care, and I trust with humility and impartiality, as a practical concern of great moment to a minister of the gospel. Having been chosen to prepare an essay on the topic now presented to the public, to be read

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at the annual meeting of a numerous and respectable association of ministers ; and the sentiments of the essay meeting with the approbation of most present, (though questioned by others, whom I highly esteem and love,) I was requested by many individuals to give them the essay in a more permanent form.

I beg to apologize to those brethren for the delay of the publication. It has arisen, they may be assured, from no want of regard to their urgent request, but from a multitude of engagements, and from a wish to examine some points, here treated of, with more care than my leisure allowed during the composition.

I think it due to those who at first took an interest in the sentiments here maintained, to state, that the additions

they may meet with, relate chiefly to the distinction which originally obtained between the Congregationalist and the Independent,—a distinction which seems to exist among ourselves to this day.

The subject of ministerial authority, I have also briefly inquired into, under the third chapter.

Another point more particularly attended to, is, that of ruling elders. The more I read and think on the subject, the more am I convinced of the justness of the position, that the term elder is a *generic* term, and that bishop and deacon are the species. Hence, I conclude, that there were originally but those two permanent officers in the church of Christ.

I have, finally, considered more

closely the communion of churches,—a point maintained theoretically by many, who are either unable to carry their views into effect, or who, if able, are restrained by jealousy and fear.

Nothing should a good man aim at so much as the consolidation and the purity, the harmony, and the increase, of the churches of Christ. Distinct from any party or sectarian feelings, such, I trust, has been my aim, though with far too short of that comprehension of mind, which the great subject demands.

Hitchin, Herts,
May, 1821.

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A

COMPARATIVE VIEW,

&c.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

“ *Inter utrumque tene.*”

OVID. MET.

AN opinion has, of late years, begun to prevail, that Christ instituted no one particular form of polity for his church on earth, but that he left it open to expediency, to settle such a form, as shall best suit the particular government, manners, and prejudices, of the country into which the gospel is introduced. Such was the opinion of the acute and impartial Campbell. After taking much pains, and establishing on satisfactory evidence, from scripture, and the apostolical fathers, that the primitive form of church-government was not *episcopal*, in the common ecclesiastical sense,

B

he concludes his inquiry, by saying ; “ It will be observed, by the judicious and the candid, that what has been advanced, does not affect the lawfulness, or even, in certain circumstances, ~~the expediency, of the episcopal~~ model ; it only exposes the arrogance of pretending to a *jus divinum*. I am satisfied, that no form of polity can plead such an exclusive charter, as that phrase, in its present acceptance, is understood to imply. The claim is clearly the offspring of sectarian bigotry and ignorance. In regard to those politics which obtain at present in the different Christian sects, I own, ingenuously, ~~that I have not found one~~ of all that I have examined, which can be said perfectly to coincide with the model of the apostolical church. Some, indeed, are nearer, and some are more remote ; but ~~this~~ we may say, with freedom, that if a particular form of polity had been essential to the church, it had been laid down in another manner in the sacred books. The very hypothesis is, in my opinion, repugnant to the spiritual nature of the evangelical economy. It savours grossly of the conceit with which the Jews were intoxicated of the Messiah’s secular kingdom,—a conceit with which many like-minded Christians are intoxicated still.”*

If, then, the whole affair of church-govern-

* Eccles. Hist. Lect. 4.

ment is thus committed to the wisdom or the inclinations of men; what occasion for the learned Doctor and others, to labour so hard to prove what was apostolic and primitive? When it is made out in the most satisfactory manner, we are, after all, at liberty whether we will follow it or not!—a doctrine pregnant with the most injurious practical consequences! Surely the Redeemer, after shedding his blood for the church, has not abandoned it to every wind of opinion or caprice! Surely the important concern of regulating the worship and the manners of Christians, is not left to chance! We cannot suppose the Redeemer indifferent whether his kingdom be worldly or spiritual, corrupt or pure!

Something, it is admitted, must be left to expediency. But, to provide against these exigencies, general rules are given, which, after all, must be the test of every provisional ordinance: “Let all things,” says the apostle, “be done decently, and in order.” “Let all things be done to edifying.”*

But, that the apostles regarded no one order in the establishment of the Christian church, is neither probable, *a priori*, nor true, in fact. Paul says to the Corinthians, “Timothy shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ Jesus, as I teach every where in

* 1 Cor. xiv. 26, 40.

every church :”* and again, “ So I ordain in all the churches.”†. “ If any man seem to be contentious, we have no such *customs*,” (referring to the practice of women appearing with their heads uncovered,) “ neither the *churches* of God.”‡

It appears certain, therefore, that, in the beginning, some particular form of church-government was settled, which *had* the sanction of the *jus divinum*: and, though the logical exhibition of this form is not given us in the New Testament, any more than “ the form of sound words,” which was delivered by the apostle to Timothy; yet we may be assured that both are there, in substance, and in every vital point.

Not that it is impossible to hold the traditions of the primitive church with good will and forbearance to others, who may not “ see eye to eye” with us. That popish, dogmatical pretension to infallibility, which lays claim to exclusive wisdom, and knowledge, and authority, both in faith and discipline, the genuine disciple of Christ will avoid and abhor. While we firmly believe we have the *jus divinum* on our side, if we possess the Spirit of Christ, we shall, “ in meekness, instruct them that oppose themselves,” rather than “ call down fire” upon them from heaven.

* 1 Cor. iv. 17. † 1 Cor. vii. 17. ‡ 1 Cor. xi. 16.

Granting, too, that there is an established order of church-government laid down in the scripture, we shall not, with some, treat the subject with levity, as one of small importance, compared with the discovery of the way of salvation. If that is the thing of greatest moment in the scriptures, this is next in importance. If the laws and government of a single nation are objects of the greatest interest to mankind, shall that kingdom and that government, which embrace the whole world, and relate to every human being, be treated with indifference? The first thing, undoubtedly, is, separation from the ungodly world, as the adopted children of God; and the next thing is, how we are to live together in church-fellowship, when thus separated.*

* We subscribe, therefore, to the sentiment of Dupin on this subject, when he says : "Il n'est donc pas inutile, comme quelques-uns se le sont imaginé, de s'appliquer à la recherche de la discipline de l'ancienne eglise ; au contraire c'est une étude de tres-grand utilité, et tres-necessaire à un theologien." And I cannot forbear, also, transcribing a passage in point, from a more recent author, the Rev. Mr. Carson, in his answer to Mr. Brown, on Presbytery. "Many," says he, "treat the question of church-government, as quite insignificant. I am persuaded that it is of very great importance. For, until it be fully understood, there cannot be any cordial and enlightened union and co-operation among Christians ; and the world will be stumbled by the multitude of sects and denominations. Division among Christians certainly must be sinful. It is, then, surely no

The discussion of this subject, with a temperate and humble mind, free from the spirit of a partisan, will not be injurious to us as individuals, nor do harm to the great cause to which we are attached. Whether it may do all that good, in the present instance, which is desired and intended, is known only to Him who knoweth all things. Whatever may be the fate of the attempt, to draw Christians together into "the same mind and the same judgment," so far as that is possible in the present state, has ever been the aim of wise and good men. Many irenical treatises have been written, and several attempts have been made towards an extensive comprehension of good men of different judgments in religious matters; most of which, alas! have failed. "The time to favour Sion" was not come. Certain symptomatic movements, however, have appeared of late years, and even of recent date, from which we would fain augur some happier result.

The principal forms of church-government which have obtained, are the Episcopal, the Presbyterian, and the Independent: or, in other words, the monarchical, the aristocratical,

useless inquiry to seek where this sin lies. Let us then discuss this subject as largely as the subject demands." See Letter x. page 525.

and the democratical.* And it might be thought as proper, to examine the relations of each and all of these forms to one another, as of *two* only. But, as it is evident our aim is union and consolidation, we confess it to be our opinion, founded on history, as well as theory, that a union of all the *three* forms, appears to us as *hopeless* as it would be *unscriptural*. An aristocracy and a democracy naturally approach nearer to one another than to a monarchy, and are likely to be amicably united, sooner than a monarchy is with either.

In the kingdom of Christ, there is but one monarch, and that is Christ himself. "One is our Master and Lord, even Christ;" and his ministers are not monarchs, but brethren. An episcopacy (according to the usual acceptance of the term) being in its own nature monarchical, we reject it, *in limine*, as irrelevant to the present discussion.

We proceed, therefore, immediately to the point in hand. Amidst so great a range of particulars as the subject affords, we have se-

* By applying the word *democratical* to the Independent form of church-government, I would not, on any account, be understood to implicate their views of *civil* government. The persons who may see in the scriptures a democracy as to the government of the church of Christ may be, and undoubtedly are, attached to a mixed government in affairs of state. I should hope, therefore, no construction will be put on the term thus used, different from what is meant.

lected the following, as embracing the principal matters needful to be considered.

I. The general constitution of the Church of Christ.

II. Admission of members.

III. The officers of the Church.

IV. The relation of the Churches to each other.

CHAPTER II.

On the general constitution of the Church of Christ.

PRESBYTERY, it may be observed, is not necessarily associated with an establishment; though it must be confessed it is very closely allied to the civil power. Many Presbyterians, it is well known, carry on their form of government without the interposition of the magistrate. In fairness, therefore, we ought to take unestablished Presbytery as the standard of comparison. With High-Church Presbytery, we can have as little to do as with Episcopacy: the pretensions of both are so arrogant, that all accommodation is hopeless. Those topographical ideas of the church of Christ, entertained by many Presbyterians in common with Episcopalians, are so repugnant to the views of its nature and character given in the scriptures; they are so worldly and unspiritual, that he who forms his views of the Christian church from scripture alone, sees, in so earthly a system, the subversion of all that is sacred, and

peculiar, and select in the christian character ; and the confused mixture of faith with unbelief, hypocrisy with sincerity, purity with corruption, sin with holiness, so as almost to destroy all distinction between them. In short, it seems an invention in meditated opposition to that declaration of our Lord ; “ My kingdom is not of this world.”

Both Presbytery and Independency sprang from Puritanism ; i. e. from an effort, after a long night of darkness and corruption, to restore the church of Christ to its original purity and lustre. Calvin, and Knox, and Ames, and Brown, all had the same thing in view,—to restore the church to greater purity of character. They differed somewhat in the extent to which the purification should go, as well as the nature and limits of that authority by which it should be effected. In the noble efforts of the first Independents, to cast off all lordly usurpations over conscience, they seem, as is generally the case in revolutions, to have gone to an extreme, and to have maintained principles, which tended much to the dissociating of the churches of Christ. An apology, however, may be found in the harrassings and troubles to which their principles exposed them. It was a first effort to break the iron yoke. If there was any thing schismatical in their principles or their practice, it should charitably be attributed, in many

cases, more to their circumstances, than to their inclinations. Experience, however, matured their views on the subject of church-government. It was a new study: some beheld one feature in a strong light: the contemplation of others was directed to another. The study was carried on in troublous times, unfavourable to a consolidation of opinion and of interest. Hence, those attempts which were occasionally made to effect union, proved abortive.

From the original Puritans, three classes arose, approximating, in their views of the church of Christ, in many points; yet maintaining such distinctions, as proved sufficient to characterise them all. These classes were denominated the Presbyterian, the Congregational, and the Independent. The specific difference of the Presbyterian polity consisted, principally, in the dependence of all the churches of a given district on a Court of Delegates, composed of ministers and ruling elders, and backed, in all their decisions, by the authority of the civil magistrate. Diametrically opposed to these, stood the Brownists, or strict Independents, who insisted on the primitive independence of the churches; and seem to have been opposed to the union of churches, and the authority of the ministers. The Congregationalists took a middle path, and contended for the close union and *dependence* of churches,

though not founded on the natural *authority* of the churches, or the ministers over one another.

The Congregationalists were originally termed Independents: but this designation they renounced;* and, by that act, distinguished themselves from Independents;—though the custom of speech has generally confounded the two designations. Robinson, from whose work intituled, “*Apologia pro Exulibus Anglis, qui Brownistæ vulgo appellantur*,” published at Leyden in 1619, the name of *Independent*, probably, took its rise, was at first a rigid Independent or Brownist: in later life, however, he became a Congregationalist; and seems to have impressed his views on the church at Leyden so strongly, that, on the emigration of a considerable part of the church to New England, the character of the Congregationalist, as distinguished from the Brownist or strict Independent, became more accurately defined than even in Great Britain. Hence in the history of New England, we find frequent allusions to the distinction between Presbyterian, Congre-

* The Independents publicly assumed this name, says Mosheim, in 1644, by their “*Apology*.” But many seditious persons availing themselves of the title, the true Independents renounced this title, and substituted another less odious, calling themselves *Congregational Brethren*, and their religious assemblies, *Congregational Churches*.

Maclaine’s Mosh. ii. 501.

gationalist, and Independent. The New England churches were professedly Congregational, as distinct from the other two. In their platform of church-discipline, published 1649, they declare their sense of the general nature of the church of Christ in these terms: (See Book v. chap. ii. §. 5.) "The state of the members of the militant visible church, walking in order, was either before the law, œconomical, that is, in families; or, under the law, national, or, since the coming of Christ, only Congregational. (The term *Independent*, we approve not.) Therefore neither national, provincial, nor classical." Cotton Mather, in his history of New England, describing the views of Eliot on church-discipline, as those which he and his brethren highly approved, says; "He looked upon the *Congregational way*, as a largess of divine bounty, bestowed by the Lord Jesus Christ on his people that followed him into this wilderness, with a peculiar zeal for communion with him in his pure worship here. He perceived in it a sweet sort of *temperament*, between *rigid Presbyterianism*, and *levelling Brownism*; so that, on the one side, the liberties of the people are not oppressed and overlaid; on the other side, the authority of the elders is not rendered insignificant, but a due balance is herein kept upon both; and hence, he closed with our *platform of church discipline*,

as being the nearest of what he had yet seen, to the directions of heaven." (See Book iii. part ii. art. 5.)

In Dr. John Owen, we have an eminent instance and specimen of the distinction which existed in England, between the original Independents and the Congregationalists. By some he is considered a non-descript,—neither Presbyterian nor Independent; though leaning more to the Independent than the other. But this contest respecting the denomination to which he in sentiment actually belonged, may be closed, by assigning him to the Congregationalists. From a Presbyterian, he became a Congregationalist, and never admitted the levelling and democratical views of the Brownists, or strict and original Independents.

By the year 1658, such a knowledge of the subject of church-polity obtained, that those churches, which, by their representatives, met in Synod at the Savoy, in that year, could with ease make a common declaration of their *Congregationalist* principles; and these were, in the main, the same with those of New England. The Savoy declaration studiously avoids the appellation of *Independents*, which had formerly been the designation of those who were parties to it;—nay, as we shall hereafter quote, gave a public testimony against the dissociation of their churches in former years. By this act

they acquired a new character, and appeared in more visible union with the Congregationalists of New England; with whom, indeed, they kept up a friendly connexion.

In our own day, some, both in North and South Britain, apparently wish to maintain the original strictness of Independency; while others, professedly of the same denomination, approach nearer to Presbytery. A conviction has settled on the minds of many, that ministers and churches are too insulated; and, without any definite ideas of the alteration wanted, to meet the evils actually existing, they complain, and go on without coming to any decision. The full and strict method of *representative* government of the Presbyterians, they cannot go into; probably because they see that too much is assumed over the liberty of the brethren, and the ministers of particular churches. Yet, something of the nature of Presbytery, without its unscriptural assumptions, they would wish to see more generally prevailing.

To such, the general* views of *Congrega-*

* I say, their *general* views; because in some points, viz. Synods, Councils, the power of the Magistrate, &c. we may not think *some* Congregationalists have adhered so strictly to the New Testament, and the spirituality of the church of Christ, as they ought to have done.

tionalists, as distinguished from the Independents, seem to offer all that is desired. By them a middle course is steered, between the aristocracy of the Presbyterian, and the democracy of the Independent:* or rather, there is such a balance of the two, properly adjusted to each other, as, perhaps, taken in connexion with the sole and supreme monarchy of the Lord Jesus Christ, forms the perfect constitution of his church on earth. The Congregational system admits the full competency of each particular church to manage its own affairs, and infringes not upon individual liberty;—this is the main point of Independency: but it goes further, and acknowledges a local association of elders and brethren, for the purpose of watchful care and superintendence,—an association, *not founded in authority to enforce its decrees*, but, in neighbourly and brotherly good will and affection, to advise, to warn, to comfort, to as-

* “Some,” says Dr. Owen, “would have all Christians to be almost ministers, others, none but ministers to be God’s Clergy: those would give the people the keys;—these use them to lock them out of the church. The one ascribing to them, primarily, all ecclesiastical power for the ruling of the congregation;—the other abridging them of the performance of spiritual duties, for the building of their own souls. As if there were no habitable earth between the valley,—I had almost said, the pit of democratical confusion, and the precipitous rock of hierarchical tyranny.”

Review of Schism, p. 10. in Orme’s Life of Owen.

sist, as the circumstances of the churches may require. This affords all the lawful advantages of Presbytery, without its offensive power.

Such a system, *primâ facie*, seems calculated, under a divine blessing, to promote and secure the purity, the peace, and the prosperity of the church of Christ.

The further development of its nature, together with the authority of scripture on which it rests, will be considered in the last chapter.

CHAPTER III.

The admission of Members.

1. OF whom is the Church composed?

In laying so much stress on purity of character, and in requiring satisfactory evidence of "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," the Independents seem to derive their views from Scripture. The New Testament always represents the members of the Christian church, as "saints," or "faithful brethren," or "regenerated," or as "passed from death unto life." They are "called to be saints," and, "whom God has called, them he also has sanctified;" &c. &c. Every one surely must be impressed with the conviction, that the main intention of scripture, is, to mark out those who are to compose the church of God, as characters quite distinct and separate from the men of the world.

Presbyterians, it is to be feared, too generally content themselves with superficial and inadequate proofs of the formation of the christian

character. Hence the prevailing secularity of their members, and of too many of their ministers. In fact, it appears, that, by admitting a cold and speculative belief of the doctrines of Christianity, as evidence sufficient for church-fellowship, both ministers and church-members have been, too frequently, blended with the ungodly world. The evil seems to arise out of the system; for, among them, the character of a church-member is determined chiefly, if not entirely, by a minister of a congregation. The society, into which the member is to be received, — (if those persons can be called a society, who are never called upon to deliberate or to act,) — knows nothing of such a member, but that he has been judged fit by the minister, for the participation of the Lord's Supper. Now, supposing that minister should have defective views of the christian character, and exhibit that deficiency in his own, what kind of church-members is he likely to join together in church-fellowship? It will be a mere accident if genuine piety be admitted; — nay, it may, by such a man, be purposely excluded.

The first association of a Christian church must, in its very nature, be a *voluntary* act of certain individuals, judging each other in charity, to have become partakers of the grace of God; according to the scripture phrase, " they

gave themselves first to the Lord ;”* spoken of the churches of Macedonia.

The first churches were very particular as to character, as we may judge from those letters of commendation, which the brethren carried with them, when they sought communion with foreign churches. They evidently did not consider our Lord’s parable of the tares and the wheat, as an authority for admitting all, or nearly all, indiscriminately to the fellowship of the church: nor did the apostles, whose letters so frequently insist on the maintenance of a pure and holy character, in the professed people of God: and when the apostle Jude speaks of “ certain men having *crept in unawares*, who were ungodly, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ,” it implies, that the faith and conduct of candidates for church-fellowship, underwent a certain scrutiny previously to admission.

How is it, then, that Presbytery, both at home and abroad, has contracted a character, not so pure and so select, as that which the scripture prescribes, nor such as may more frequently be found in some other communions? It is to be traced, chiefly, to a defective character in its ministers, as giving the tone, by

* 2 Cor viii. 6.

their example, and by their church-power, to the character of the communicants.

The people, by giving up all into the hands of their church-rulers, and by laying aside their deliberative* capacity, have become supine and lax in their views of christian character; whereas, the Independents, by contending for this just right, have ever been alive to the qualifications of candidates for fellowship and office, and have, thereby, been preserved from many corruptions.

The Independents, however, have probably carried their views to an immoderate length: they have, in their honest zeal, required more, and stricter marks of conversion to God, than they were warranted to do; and thus, many individuals have been shut out from the privileges of the church, whom the Lord has received.

This error, though in one view venial, in another, is highly injurious,—not to say criminal. Perhaps it were better to be deceived ten times by the professions of candidates, than to run the hazard of excluding one sincere soul, for

* “The people must make their mind known by petition to Church Courts.” Carson’s Reasons, page 34.

“The whole congregation, minister, elders, and people, could not put away from their communion the grossest adulterer, if the superior ecclesiastical judicatories would think proper to screen him.” Ibid. page 65.

want of every mark of attainment, or of sincerity, which we could desire. Though a person be "weak in the faith," he is not to be rejected, but received; in order that he may be strengthened.

We must not be understood to wish, that Independents were less particular, as to religious character. All we mean is, to object to the practice of setting up one's own individual, and, perhaps, peculiar experience, as the invariable standard for others. I have heard of several deacons in Independent churches, who have occasioned much trouble to the churches, and injured their prosperity, by requiring all candidates to possess just their particular kind and degree of religious experience. And any one who has observed the tendency of the minds of most Christians to this error, must admit, that some check to the evils it produces, ought to be provided; at the same time, that every proper attention is paid to the requisite qualifications of a church-member.* The check exists, I conceive, in the nature of that authority with which the elders of the church are invested. This check may appear to be inconsistent with christian liberty, and the privilege of every individual, in expressing his opinion

* See Carson, *Reasons*, page 97.

or wish respecting the admission of members: but the question is, May any member be permitted to keep out of the church whom he pleases, it may be, merely from private pique, or supposed disqualification, while the person appears to the elders and others, a suitable character? Is unanimity, in all points, absolutely indispensable? It is doubtless desirable when it can be obtained. By the first disciples, however, a matter was determined by the majority of suffrages, as in the choice of Matthias to fill up the place of Judas Iscariot. Mr. Canton insists on *perfect unanimity*; but this seems extravagant. The Scripture evidently warrants us in taking the sense of the majority. Reason and experience tell us, that, in most cases, it should be a large and good majority. Of this, the discretion of the elders will judge. And here exists, I conceive, the proper *check* to any improper exercise of the right and privilege in the brethren. If, after a pastor has proposed an individual for fellowship, he should appear to be disapproved by several or many in the church, and these persons whose judgment he respects, it would not be wise to press the matter,—at least at that time: opportunity would thus be afforded for explanation or inquiry. But, if only one or two, or a few of the weaker brethren, should oppose, unless they could show cause against

the admission, their opposition must of necessity be overruled.

The question would here arise, Do not majorities tend to diminish the just authority of a minister? May not a minister have a majority against him? This objection must be answered by inquiring, wherein the authority of the pastor consists: but for the examination of this point, we refer to chap. iii. sect. 2.

Independents, moreover, may do well, perhaps, to learn a lesson from Presbyterians, in respect to their diligence and regularity in catechising and instructing the young, *with an express view to church-fellowship*. In shunning Scylla, they have fallen into Charybdis. They seem, in general, to have depended too much on the ordinance of preaching, for the replenishing of their churches; and to have neglected, in some measure, that of regular personal instruction of the baptized. Though the children of church-members are not, perhaps, constituted actual members of a church by baptism, surely, to be consistent, they ought to be considered as catechumens, and candidates for fellowship. And, if so, an eye of watchful care should be kept upon them, as well by the church,* to which they naturally stand re-

* Among the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists, the children of church-members are admitted to the conferences of the church on the sabbath.

lated, as by their parents. If baptism and instruction be joined together by our Lord, as they are in the commission given to his disciples in the twenty-eighth chapter of Matthew, then the baptized must, undoubtedly, be treated as the disciples of Christ, and be trained up, both by parents and the church, in "the nurture and the admonition of the Lord."

It does not follow, however, that all the baptized must necessarily be received into fellowship. Admitting the right of a particular church to receive whom it will, though not to the exclusion of any who evince a work of grace begun, a judgment may and ought to be formed, respecting the spiritual character of the young candidate for admission. The church is, certainly, not called upon to admit such, merely on the ground of *fashion*, or *decency*. Were they to do so, there would be an end, at once, to all purity and selectness in their own character: the church and the world would become one and the same. We are expressly commanded to "turn away from those who have the *form* of godliness, but deny the *power* thereof." *

* If any say this was addressed to Timothy, (τῷ Τιμω,) we answer, that the Apostle is speaking of what shall happen in the *last days*; and, therefore, must be supposed to address believers at large in the last days. 2 Tim. iii. 5.

But, while we defend the right and the duty of a church of God, to exercise this vigilance over the characters of the persons admitted, we are far from taking the business and duty of instruction and superintendence out of the hands of the ministers of the church. They are to oversee the whole flock, and to feed Christ's lambs, as well as his sheep: only they are not to assume the power of admitting or rejecting whom they will, without the voice of the church. That the important affair of admitting, censuring, or excluding members, is a public act of the church assembled, with its ministers, and by their ministry, appears most clear from the language of scripture. To the Romans, the Apostle says; "Him that is weak in the faith receive *ye*."* And again; "Receive *ye* one another, as Christ also hath received us, to the glory of God."† And again; "I commend unto you Phoebe, our sister, who is a servant of the church at Cenchrea, that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints; and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you."§ The Corinthians are charged, to "put away from among themselves that wicked person."‡ And to moderate their zeal, he says; "Sufficient to such a man is this

* Rom. xiv. 1.

† Rom. xv. 7.

§ Rom. xvi. 1.

‡ 1 Cor. v. 13.

punishment, or rather *censure*, (ἐπιτιμία,) which was inflicted by many," ὑπο τῶν πλειονων,—a phrase which may, perhaps, be better interpreted,—*the major part*. No forced and unnatural sense* put on Matthew xviii. 17. "tell it to the church," as if our Lord meant the rulers of the church alone, to the exclusion of the members, will justify the assumption of "the power of the keys" by the ministers. Our limits will

* Mr. Brown, in his vindication of Presbytery, seems to have been driven to an extremity, in his wishes to establish the meaning of our Lord's command, "tell it to the church," to be, "tell it to the rulers only;" for he attempts to prove it, by endeavouring to show, that the word "church" is elsewhere used in the New Testament, for the *rulers only*: and, in proof, he refers to Acts viii. 1, 4. from whence he argues, that as it is said, "there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem, and they were all dispersed throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles;" and, again, soon after, that "Saul made havock of the church," &c. therefore, that the word, "church" in the first case, means the *rulers* of the church, and, in the second, the *members*: because if *all* the church was scattered abroad, and yet *some* were left at Jerusalem, and persecuted after the dispersion; and those dispersed "went every where preaching the word;" then, we must conclude it was the ministers or rulers of the church only who were scattered abroad. Mr. Carson, in his "Reply," has properly disposed of this *argument*: and I think every unsophisticated mind, whether learned or unlearned, on comparing the argument with the text, will be satisfied that the writer never intended any such meaning; but first merely states, in general, the fact of the persecution, and then proceeds to mention *some* of the particulars.

not allow it, or we could show, that the passages most insisted on, to support this assumption, have been wrested from their natural and proper sense, and that a sophistical and far-fetched gloss has been put upon them. But this task is unnecessary, after the clear evidence already adduced, that the power of the keys resides, not in the ministers alone, but, (according to the beautiful simile of Ignatius, in his epistle to the Ephesians,) in the ministers and the members *in unison*, as a well-tuned lyre:—otherwise, the ministers of Christ become “lords over God’s heritage.”

And this is the doctrine of the Congregationalists. In the New England platform, (which, by the way, was embraced by the Presbyterians of that country,) it is said, chap. x. sect. 9. “It belongs unto the elders, before to examine any officers or members, before they be received of the church, to receive the accusations brought to the church, and to prepare them for the church’s hearing,” &c. Again, chap. xii. sect. 1. “The angel of the church at Ephesus is commended for trying such as said they were apostles, and were not: there is like reason for trying of them that profess themselves to be believers. This power of government in the elders doth not, in any wise, prejudice the power of privilege in the brotherhood, as neither the power of privilege in the brethren doth prejudice

the power of government in the elders ; but they may sweetly agree together, as we may see in the example of the apostles, furnished with the greatest church-power, who took in the concurrence and consent of the brethren in church administrations." chap. x. sect. 10.

II. The mode of admission.

Admitting that the reception of a church-member is to be a public act, the mode of performing it may be left to circumstances. The rigorous exactions of some Independents are not to be defended : yet their practice, in requiring satisfactory evidence of a spiritual character, is warranted by that general injunction of the apostle Peter's: " Be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear."* On this subject, I cannot adduce any argument equal to an historical fact, mentioned by Mather in the New England History. " As for the circumstances of admission into this church," (the first church in Massachusetts,) they left it very much to the discretion and faithfulness of their elders, together with the condition of the persons to be admitted. Some were admitted by expressing their con-

* 1 Pet. iii. 15.

sent unto their confession and covenant. Some were admitted after their first answering to questions about religion propounded unto them. Some were admitted, when they had presented, *in writing*, such things as might give satisfaction unto the people of God concerning them. And some that were admitted, *orally* addressed the people of God, in such terms as they thought proper to ask their communion with. Which diversity was, perhaps, more beautiful, than would have been a more punctilious uniformity. But none were admitted without regard unto a blameless and holy conversation." See Hist. book i. chap. 4.

CHAPTER IV.

The Officers of the Church.

I. How many kinds ?

The principal point at issue on this question, is, whether the scripture has instituted the order of *ruling elders*, as well as the orders of teaching elders and deacons ; and the chief passage to support the affirmative, if not the only one in point, is that in 1. Tim. v. 17. " Let the elders that rule well, be accounted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in word and doctrine." And it must be confessed, I think, that there is an evident distinction made, between those elders, who merely *rule well*, and those who, both *rule well*, and *labour in word and doctrine*. But the difficulty is, how to reconcile this view of the passage, with the omission of any distinct notice of the office of ruling elders, in any other part of the New Testament ; while the offices of *bishop* and *deacon* are recognised and set forth with sufficient clearness ; beside, that, in describing

the qualifications of church-officers, the apostle enumerates only *two* kinds,—bishop and deacon. Had there been a *third*, the omission is unaccountable.

Suicerus quotes a remark of Flacius Illyricus, one of the Centuriators of Magdeburgh, on 1 Tim. v. 17, that, probably, the deacons are there comprehended with the ruling elders.* This remark carries the mind further; and we are led to ask, *Are not ruling elders and deacons one and the same?* Such a conjecture, it is true, does not agree with the ideas, either of the ancients, or of the moderns: but the fact is, the deacon's office is, confessedly, understood but imperfectly. The meaning of the term literally is, a *minister* or *servant*; and is used, in the New Testament, very generally, for any service performed by the apostles or others. Our Lord says; “Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your *deacon*.”† Paul says to the Corinthians; “Who then is Paul, and who Apollos, but *deacons*, by whom ye believed?”‡ And to Timothy, he says, “Setting

* “Hic simul observa, duplices fuisse Presbyteros; alios, quidem, qui tantum regimen ecclesiæ ac disciplinæ, consilio et autoritate, juverunt, *inter quos fortè etiam diaconi fuerunt*: alios verò Presbyteros fuisse, qui etiam docuerunt, quique dicti sunt pastores et episcopi.”

Suicer. in vocem *πρεσβυτερος*.

† Matt. xx. 26. ‡ 1 Cor. iii. 5.

these things before the brethren, thou shalt be a good *deacon* of Jesus Christ."*

In the same way is the term *elder* used. Some confine it to the pastor, and others to the office called *ruling elder*: but, in the scripture, it is used generally; and is applied to different offices as a *generic term*. Peter was an elder. Paul ordained elders in every church. (See Acts xiv. 23.) Did he ordain *only* pastors, or *only* ruling elders? Neither case can be supposed. He surely ordained them bishops and deacons, as the proper officers of the church in its organized state. The term *elder*, therefore, may be considered as generic. The Jews had the same distinction. Among them, the term *elder* was in general use, to signify any office of honour and authority; and was applied specifically to the civil magistrate, the public counsellor, the rulers of the synagogue, &c.

Now, if we find that the term *deacon* was applied to the same persons as the term *elder*, there is nothing improbable in the supposition, that *deacon* and *elder* were convertible terms; and, therefore, that a ruling elder might have been a deacon, and a deacon a ruling elder. I think we shall find this supposition confirmed by fact: and, if we can show, that bishops are elders bearing rule, and that deacons are

* 1 Tim. iv. 6.

assistants to them, it will follow, that deacons may, not improperly, be termed ruling elders. And, moreover, if there were but two kinds of officers in the church, viz.,-bishops and deacons ; then, that the deacons must have been *actually* ruling elders, together with the bishops. We shall proceed, now, to show the nature of their office, with a view to establish this identity.

It is usual to consider the deacon's office as confined to money matters ; and the institution of it to have taken place by the setting apart of " the seven." Yet, it is to be observed, the seven are, in no place of scripture, called deacons ; nor, indeed, are they mentioned by any distinct official title. Their immediate duties were necessarily of a temporary nature, viz. to serve at table, and act the part of stewards, to see that none were neglected, but that all had a sufficient portion of the common stock. When the brethren ceased to have all things common, this office, we may suppose, was laid down : but the spirit of it, at least, was retained in the church ; and, as it was a principle with the first christians, that each church should take care of its own poor, there was a reason for the continuance of the office ; and, at length, the name of *deacon* was emphatically appropriated to it.

The common notion, that the deacon's office was *confined* to the collection, and distribution

of the church-money, does not seem to be supported by the earliest antiquity. Justin Martyr gives the following account. (Apol. §. 88.) "Those who are rich and well-disposed give (*viz.* at the Eucharist) according to their inclination; and what is collected, *is deposited with the president*; (*παρὰ τῷ πρεσβυτέρῳ*;) and *he* assists orphans and widows, as well as those who are in want from disease or any other cause: he relieves prisoners also, and shows hospitality to strangers. In short, he is the common provider for all that are in want."

The president here meant is clearly *the pastor*, as appears from the 85th section, where he is represented as conducting the whole of the sacred services.

The pastor, we cannot suppose, was able, by his own hands, to minister to the wants of all in distress; and, as the deacons were employed, not only in distributing the elements of the supper, but in carrying them to those who were absent, (see Apol. §. 87.) we may infer, that they were employed, at the same time, *under the direction of the pastor*, in the distribution of the church-money. In this, as in other things, they were *ministers and assistants to the pastor*, helping him under the burden of his work. Dr. Lightfoot seems to have spoken too hastily on this subject, when he likens the deacons to the *Phernasim* of the synagogue;

making them out to have been collectors of alms, and as exclusively having the care of the poor. Vitringa, in his observations on the Jewish synagogue, has, with much candour, and extensive erudition, refuted the Doctor's statements; and has shown that the *Phernasim* did not collect the alms; and that the term פֶּרְנָס *phernas* does not particularly apply to any one class of officers of the synagogue, but that it is, like the term elder, of general signification, and is applied to different offices of trust and honour.

Having admitted that the office of deacon *has* to do with the pecuniary affairs of the church, under the limitations above mentioned; we proceed to ask, *Had the deacons no spiritual oversight in the church, as the assistants of the bishop?* Those who have suffered from the lordly and arbitrary conduct of some modern deacons so called; will tremble to discover any foundation for establishing their abused power. Let us, however, recollect, that we are to distinguish between the person and the office; and let us follow the light of truth, to what point soever it may conduct us.

Arguing from the general meaning of the term, and from the language used by Paul and Timothy, we should infer, that the deacons *had* some ruling power. The apostle requires of deacons to *rule* their own houses well. Just before, he had required the same of a bishop,

and then he gives this reason for the qualification ; “ for if he know not how to *rule* his own house, how shall he take care of a church of God ? ” (πως εκκλησιας θειου επιμελησεται ;) The same reason may naturally be supposed to operate in the case of deacons ; they are not required to be “ apt to teach,” but they are required to be apt to *rule*. Moreover, it may be observed, that nearly the same phraseology is used in both passages of the epistle : in the one place, it is said ; Διακονοι εγνωσαν μιας γυναικος ανδρες, τεκνων καλως προϊσταμενοι, και των ιδιων οικων· οι γαρ καλως διακονησαντις, κ. τ. λ. and, in the other place, it is said : οι καλως προϊσταντες πρεσβυτεροι, κ. τ. λ. Under the term *elders*, then, were probably comprehended, both the offices of bishops and deacons.

This view of the passage, also, seems confirmed by the order of the Jewish synagogue, to which our Lord is, by many divines, supposed, in a great measure, to have conformed his church. Vitringa has examined this point thoroughly ; and I can do no better than quote his statements ; remarking by the way, that an accurate analysis of his observations on the synagogue, would serve valuable purposes. He begins his treatise, by endeavouring to show, that the term פֶּרְנָס *phernas*, has been mistaken, and means, in general, a *pastor or ruler*. He then proceeds to the consideration of the ten wise men, which number, at least,

was required to preside in every synagogue. One of these he considers as the *archisynagogus*, or ruler of the synagogue, who was chief in its affairs, and overlooked them all, to see that every part was properly performed. To this chief, he thinks two others, men of reputation for wisdom and gravity, were added, in the same office of ruling and overlooking ; reserving to themselves the liberty of teaching ; and these also were called *αρχισυναγωγοι*, *archisynagogi*. The remaining seven were readers of the scriptures. (Archisynag. pages 38-40.)

Such seems to have been the *primitive* state of the synagogue. Time, however, made some alterations, which our author takes due care to point out.

After the above-mentioned disquisitions, he advances to the consideration of the *חזנים*, *chazanim*, and the *שליחי הצבור*, *shelichi tzibbor*. The word *chazan*, he says, is never used in the writings of the Hebrews, as a term of honour, but uniformly as a term of ministry ; and for the most part, ministry of the lowest order. This does not seem to agree with his subsequent statements, nor with what he quotes from Elias Levita, (page 48,) who, speaking of the *chazan*, says ; “ The *chazan*, the inspector of the congregation, is he who presides over the assembly in the public prayers ; and is called

chazan, probably for this reason, that he stood over those whom he called forth to read, to *see** how they read. Thus the Baal Aruch expounds the word. But I wish to say, that I have found the messenger of the synagogue, (שליח עבד,) the servant of the congregation, (שמש הקהל,) was called חזן, *chazan*, and that, because it was incumbent on him to *see* what were the wants of the synagogue; that he might act the part which belonged to him."

According to this description of the *chazan's* office, it does not appear to be one of very inferior rank, but to entitle him to the appellation of *elder* or *archisynagogus*, equally with those ἡγούμενοι, ἡγούμενοι, *elders*, to whom Vitranga attributes the term. But, indeed, he acknowledges, (page 64,) that, at length, the chief rule of the synagogue came into the hands of the *chazanim*. His words are; "*Dictus verò hic synagogæ minister tum fuit חזן*," &c. "This minister of the synagogue was then called *chazan*, because it was his duty to attend to all the wants of the synagogue; and *sheliach tzibbor*, because he was the messenger of the assembly;† and שמש, ὑπηρέτης, *servant*, because he ministered to the heads of the syna-

* The word חזן, *chazak*, signifies to *see*.

† Or, "angel of the church"—a phrase in the Revelation of John, apparently adopted from the synagogue.

gogue, in the same manner as the wardens in our churches. But though the beginnings of these ministers were slender, their authority gradually increased; chiefly as it appears, from having many important affairs committed to them by the elders. At first, their business was to call out the readers, and preside over them; to bring forth the book of the law from the ark, and replace it; which, with increasing superstition, became an office of no small importance; to interpret the scriptures; and, to crown the whole, at length they came to offer up public prayers: so that the elders scarcely retained any thing themselves, beside the government of the assembly, and public instruction by preaching, in the absence of those, to whom that business had been committed.

“ Now, with the accession of such duties to this office, it became absolutely necessary that a man of superior wisdom and character should be appointed to it; especially since learning was on the decline among the Jews, both in our Lord’s days and after. But, although the authority of this office increased to so great an extent, yet the ancient names, חזן, *chazan*, and שליח חזבור, *sheliach hatzibbor*, (originally of mean import,) were always retained; so that he was always הוא אשר יקרא את התורה ואת הכתובים ויאמר את המעשר והתרומה *διακονος*, *the deacon of the synagogue and its elders*.

" We may easily conceive, that to an officer, now grown into so much importance, the ancient and original duties of cleansing the synagogue, and trimming the lamps, would appear degrading. Another was, therefore, put in subordination to him, on whom these servile offices were laid, and who was commonly called *שפן, ὑπηρέτης, famulus*, a menial servant, a man of low rank, such as is known by the same name in the synagogue, at the present day.

" And this I take to be the genuine account of the rise and progress of the offices of the synagogue, which I have gathered from a diligent attention to the point. And, indeed, I am persuaded, that no one is able to produce any thing from the genuine writings of the Hebrews, which will not correspond, as accurately as possible, to these statements.

" But, as it is our opinion, that, in the time of our Lord, that was the constitution of the synagogue which we have now stated; and, also, that the assemblies or christian synagogues, as to their outward government, agreed in all things, with that of the Jews; it is necessary that we now point out how the offices of the christian church correspond to those of the synagogue: and, from what has preceded, we can do this without difficulty.

" We have before mentioned, that, in the synagogue, there were *רמשי הכנסת, αρχισυνάγος*

συναγωγῆς, heads of the synagogue, and מְנַיִם,
 הָגְיוּמַיִם : the first of whom used to take the
 lead in the prayers, and the public instructions
 of the church. To these, answer the ἐπισκοποι,
 and πρεσβυτεροι, the *bishops* and the pre-
 siding elders in the christian church ; of whom
 the wisest was first in rank. Then came the
 שליח הצבור, *nuncius synagogæ*, the messenger
 of the synagogue, who, it appears to us, agrees
 in every respect with the *deacons* of the ancient
 church, of whom Paul makes mention in the
 epistles to the Philippians and Timothy. It is
 an error, therefore, of no small importance,
 which, not only the learned Lightfoot, but
 learned men in general, continually make cur-
 rent, that the deacons mentioned by Paul were
 collectors of alms. From what has now been
 said, it is sufficiently evident, that, if any one
 wished to translate the words, חזן הכנסת, and
 שליח הצבור, he would not do it by a better
 phrase than this, διακονος της εκκλησιας : for, the
 duties of the deacon of the synagogue, and the
 deacon of the christian church, corresponded
 exactly to each other. There was still in the
 synagogue the שמש הכנסת, ὑπηρυτης, who was
 the lowest minister of the synagogue. To this
 officer, the ὑποδιακονος, *under-deacon*, corres-
 ponded, who was the lowest minister of all
 the christian assemblies."

From this account of the synagogue, and

the parallel here drawn between it and the primitive church, we gather, from this source of evidence, sufficient to establish the point in hand, *viz.* that there were but *two* orders of church-officers in both; and that their duties very much corresponded to each other. One point of coincidence is apparent, and on it we wish to lay the most stress, *viz.* that the *chazan* or deacon of the synagogue was the *assistant* and *deputy* of the presiding elder. We leave out of the account the third office of a *menial* nature in both, as not affecting either our argument or our inquiry.

Hence, we infer, that *the third distinct office of ruling elder* did not find its way into the church of Christ, by the appointment of the Apostles, in modelling the churches after the synagogue.

That there were but *two* officers in the primitive church, intended for perpetual observance, seems as clearly made out from the earliest christian antiquity, as from the scriptures and the synagogue. Clemens Romanus, who wrote in the name of the church at Rome, to that at Corinth, probably before the destruction of Jerusalem, in the commencement of the epistle, charges them to be obedient to their *rulers*, and to render their *elders* due honour.* And

* Ὑποτάσσεσθαι τοῖς ἡγούμενοις ὑμῶν, καὶ τιμῇ τὴν καὶ δίκηνσαι ἀποκριμένους τοῖς παρ' ὑμῶν πρεσβυτέροις.

Clem. Rom. cap. i.

in another place says ; “ The Apostles, preaching in various regions and cities, constituted their first fruits, approved by the Spirit, as *bishops and deacons* of those who should believe.” *

Polycarp, who is said by Dr. Campbell, “ certainly to have written his epistle to the *Philippians*, a considerable time before the middle of the second century,” mentions but two orders. His words are ; “ Those who are obedient to the elders and the deacons, as to God and Christ, must refrain from these irregularities.” † It is true, he distinguishes between a presbyter and a deacon ; but it is to be remembered, that distinction began to take place, even before the date of his epistle, a distinction which, we presume, was unknown to the days of the apostles. Of this the epistles of Ignatius are a sufficient proof, even admitting they have been tampered with, which seems highly probable : though even he has such a phrase as *ὑποτασσομενοι τῇ ἐπισκοπῇ καὶ τῇ πρεσβυτερίᾳ*, which Usher has not marked as doubtful ; and this enumeration agrees with that of the scripture.

* Κατὰ χώρας καὶ πόλεις κηρύσσοντες καθίσταται τὰς ἀπαρχὰς αὐτῶν, δοκιμασάντες τῷ πνεύματι, εἰς ἐπίσκοπους καὶ διακόνους τῶν μέλλοντων πίστευειν.

Ibid. cap. xlvii.

† Διὸ δεῖν ἀπεχίσθαι ἀπο πάντων τούτων, ὑποτασσόμενοι τοῖς πρεσβυτερίοις καὶ διακονοῖς ὡς θεῷ καὶ χρίστῳ.

Polycarpi Epist.

There is a letter of Ignatius to Heron, a deacon of the church at Antioch, which confirms the opinion, that deacons were *assistants* to the pastors, and did not confine their labours to pecuniary affairs. He begins by charging him to "bear with the weak, that he may fulfil the laws of Christ; to attend to reading, that he may not only know the laws himself, but may explain them to others as God's champion. 'No soldier entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.'" He then intimates that it is the duty of Heron to watch against the introduction of false brethren: he gives him a charge to take care of widows and orphans, and says; "Do nothing without the bishops, for they are priests, (*ἱερεῖς*,) but thou art a deacon of the priests: they baptize, conduct public worship, ordain, lay on hands; and thou ministerest (*διακονεῖς*,) to them, as the holy Stephen ministered in Jerusalem to James and the elders. Neglect not the people: (*ταῖς συνάξεσι*;) seek all out by name. Let no one despise thy youth, but be thou an example of the believers, in word and conversation. Admonish my sisters, to love God, and their husbands no more than they ought, and the same to my brethren. Guard virgins as the peculiar treasure of Christ. Be thou long suffering, that thou mayest abound in prudence. Neglect not the

poor." &c. &c.—These duties seem to bespeak the ruling elder.

Justin Martyr, in his Apology, (sect. 85—88.) speaks but of two kinds of church-officers, the president or bishop, and the deacons. It is true, he states, that when the reader had ceased, the president began an exhortation, founded on the passages of scripture just read to the assembly. But this *reader* was probably one of the deacons, rather than a third distinct officer.

In further confirmation of this statement, I add the following remarks from Vitringa, Archisynag. page 312.)

“ We must now inquire into the nature of the deacon’s office, (which corresponded exactly to the *chazanites*, or ministers of the old synagogue; *whether they had authority to preach?* In this matter there is an agreement with the practice of the synagogue in the time of our Lord. *They did not ordinarily preach, but were rather CATECHISTS*; since they instructed the candidates for baptism, and imbued them with the first principles of the christian religion, just as the *chazanites* did in regard to children. Pachymeres, in his paraphrase of Dionysius the Areopagite on the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, thus speaks of deacons: ‘ They teach the candidates for baptism, that renouncing the darkness, they may be con-

ducted into the light.' And again; 'He nourishes them with doctrine.' Theophylact on the nineteenth chapter of Luke, (page 489.) says: οἱ διακονοὶ καθάρουσι διὰ κατηχήσεως καὶ διδασκαλίας. 'The deacons purify by instruction and doctrine.' The deacons, therefore, had like duties with the *chazanites*. We read, indeed, in Philostorgius, Eccles. Hist. lib. iii. of Aetius the deacon, that he was promoted by Leontius, bishop of Antioch, to teach publicly the tenets of the church. But this was extra-official, as it was also with the minister of the synagogue, who, in process of time, was often promoted by the rulers of the synagogue to preach."

"Respecting the reading of the scriptures, the gospels, and the homilies, with the offering of prayers, all performed by the deacons, I shall no further enlarge; but rather inquire into the fact of the *preaching* of deacons, which is ascribed to those of the primitive church."

"It is particularly worthy of notice, that, as among the Jews, all doctors, and others, gifted with an ability to teach, were freely permitted by the rulers of the synagogue to address the congregation, so a similar liberty, derived from the synagogue, continued in christian meetings, — a liberty most congenial with the economy of the New Testament. We find in Eusebius, (*Hist. Eccles. lib. vi. cap. 19, de Origene,*) a passage particularly pertinent. Χρὸν δὲ μιταξυ

poor." &c.
the rule
(He non-
fect on
189.)

At the time had elapsed, at Alexandria, Ori- (not thinking it safe going into Palestine, area. By the bishops tested to expound the meetings of the church, and the ordination of the Presbytery, . . . therefore was done promiscuously by the elders;) but that such was the fact is clear, from the defence of their conduct, which Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem, and Theoctistus, bishop of Cæsarea, sent to Demetrius: ' You say in your letter, that it was never seen or heard of, that *laics* should preach in the presence of bishops: '—an assertion as far as possible from the truth; for, wherever those are found who are qualified to edify the brethren, they are exhorted by the holy bishops to preach to the people: *e. g.* Euelpis of Laranda was asked by Neon; Paulinus of Iconium by Celsus; and Theodorus of Synnada by Atticus,—all our beloved brethren: and, though we are not acquainted with the fact, yet it is probable the same practice exists in other places." *

* The reader, desirous of seeing more on this interesting subject, may, in addition to Vitringæ, consult Mosheim's *Commentarii de Rebus Christianorum, Saculum prim. sect. 37, 38, 41.* His observations, though original and curious, have not afforded me that assistance in this inquiry, which I expected.

In addition to these statements, it may be observed, that, if "the seven" are to be denominated *deacons*, then we have a clear account in the scripture, of *the preaching* of two of them, *viz.* Philip and Stephen: and not of their preaching only, but of their *baptizing*;* at least in the instance of Philip; and we may infer, that, if he might perform this rite, his brethren were equally qualified with himself. It is admitted, that the circumstances of the church were peculiar in the commencement; and that, in the ordinary and settled state of it, the application of the *principle* of assistance to the pastor, must be regulated by the occasion which requires it.

The Puritan Congregationalists seem to have held similar views of the deacon's office. We find in the summary of their faith and order, entitled *Puritanismus Anglicanus*, (drawn up in Latin by the learned Dr. Ames, and intended to express the sense of the body,) that no mention is made of deacons, as distinct from elders. After describing the ministers of the word, their office and qualifications, the next point treated of is, concerning elders; an extract from which will not be out of place.

"Of Elders."

"Since, even in the best constituted churches,

* On the subject of baptism by deacons, see *Suiceri Thesaurus*, vol. i. page 631.

Now that not a few enormous offences arise, which, if not timely met, will do injury, both to those who believe, and those who are inquiring; while, at the same time, they see that the authority of a single person in a parish, resembling the papal, is contrary to the will of Christ; they think, as the case itself requires, and as appointed of God, that others also should be selected from the church, as officers, who may be associated by the ministers in the spiritual government.

“ These are inspectors, *ἐπιστάται*, a kind of censors, whose duty it is, together with the ministers of the word, as well to watch over the conduct of all the brethren, as to judge between them. And they think that this office is instituted, that each may take the more heed to himself and his ways, while the ministers enjoy more leisure for study and devotion, and obtain, through the assistance of their coadjutors, a more accurate view of the state of the flock; since it is the peculiar duty of the inspectors, to be always watchful over the manners and conduct of all the members of the church.

“ To this office they think that none should be preferred, but men, very eminent for gravity and prudence, established in the faith, of tried integrity, whose sanctity of life and upright example are well known to the whole society.

“ In the choice of these elders, respect should

be had to their outward circumstances. They should be able to support themselves in some respectable manner; though it will not be an objection to them that they pursue some mechanical art, provided they be morally qualified."

This view of the disputed passage, (1 Tim. v. 17.) reconciles it, I think, with the whole phraseology of the New Testament on the subject; and of how much importance it is to the actual wants of the churches, will be felt by many pastors, who are burdened with more labour than mind or body can sustain. It is true another consequence seems to attend it, which, to many, will not appear very pleasant, viz. That *deacons should be remunerated for their services as well as bishops*;—not to the same extent indeed; yet according to their labour: for, says the Apostle, taking his exact words: "Let the elders who rule well, be esteemed worthy of a double remuneration, especially those who labour in word and doctrine; for the scripture saith, thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn; and the labourer is worthy of his reward." Hence, *the ruling elders, or deacons, had a labour to perform, which required a just remuneration.*

There is no difficulty then in admitting that the scripture speaks of ruling elders; but whether it be a third distinct office may well be

doubted. We have only to magnify the office of the deacon, at the same time taking care, that it shall be kept subordinate to that of pastor. The Presbyterians, the Congregationalists, and the Independents, may all unite here; each may have what he wishes, and all conform to the rule of holy scripture.

II. The authority of elders.

Such has been the odious abuse of power by church-officers, that the very name of authority, as attaching to their office is by many dreaded and abhorred. Their feelings, we acknowledge, may be very natural; and while we must admire and rejoice in the spirit of religious freedom, which has cast off the iron yoke of priestly domination, we may lament the licentious paroxysm which spurns all lawful and salutary restraint. This extreme is particularly observable in the strict Independents or Brownists of the present day. At their ordinations, all idea of office-power and authority is usually protested against, very distinctly, and often with warmth. And, in their church-meetings, acting up to their professed principles, there are too often unseemly conflicts of passion, prejudice, or interest; while their pastor, unless a man of courage and address, is left to sigh over their

insubordination, or to attach himself to the strongest party for support. We do not mean to insinuate that such scenes are confined to this denomination of Christians. Far from it. They are to be met with, certainly, in most, or every denomination, where the opportunity occurs for the exhibition of them. The Presbyterian, the Episcopalian, the Methodist, the Congregationalist, can claim no exemption. Nay, the polity established by the apostles, could not prevent the occurrence of such scenes, disgraceful to the Christian name. And it is only our subject which obliges us to specify one particular denomination, as more liable, *from their professed principles*, to the frequent occurrence of disorderly scenes. We are told, however, that, "God is not the author of confusion, (*ἀναταραξία*, *seditio*, *ordo nullus: Schleusn.*) but of peace, as in all churches of the saints."* We may observe, therefore,

- 1. That the elders have *some kind* of authority.

Their generic and specific names necessarily imply it. The name elder carries with it the authority of wisdom and experience. The names pastor or shepherd, bishop or overseer, leader or captain, (*ἡγούμενος*,) all import some kind and degree of authority.

* 1 Cor. xiv. 33.

Beside, we have several places in the New Testament, where this authority is unequivocally expressed. The elders of Ephesus are said by the Apostle to have been *made overseers over the flock by the Holy Ghost*. (Acts xx. 28.) The Corinthians are enjoined to *submit themselves to such as had addicted themselves to the ministry (διακονίας) of the saints*. (1 Cor. xvi. 16.) This may relate to the *deacon's* office. The Hebrews are charged, to *obey and submit themselves to their leaders, as being watchers over their souls, and accountable for them*. (Heb. xiii. 17.)

2. That this authority does not flow from the church.

This observation, I am persuaded, will shock some, while it is agreeable to others. My business is with truth; and, after perusing most carefully what is advanced by the great Dr. Owen on this subject, I must confess that his ideas appear to be very confused, and his statements contradictory. Nor has he convinced me by scripture of the truth of his doctrine, that all power and authority is conveyed to the church of Christ, essentially considered;—unless he mean to include in the idea of the *essential church* the officers attached to it. But, if so, his statements and arguments are not in unison with this idea; for all he says of the

seat of church-power proceeds on the idea of the communication of it by Christ to the individual members of a particular church, in contradistinction to the officers; and that the authority of the elders and rulers of a particular church, flows to them through the channel of the church, as a corporate body, not yet possessed of officers.

The principal passage of scripture from whence he argues, is, Matt. xviii. 17, 18. "Tell it to the church," &c.—He is certainly not singular in considering the term "church" here to mean the assembly of the members in one particular fellowship; and he argues, from what is immediately said of *binding and loosing*, that, hereby, all authority is communicated essentially to the church, as considered in an unorganized state. Hence, he infers, that, in the ordination of ministers, &c. their authority comes to them by the election of the church, as the medium from the Lord Christ.—Though, anon, he contends, that their authority flows to them from Christ, through the medium of those already in office. And this I believe will be the truth: and I would illustrate it by a reference to the sixth chapter of the Acts, which may be viewed as a practical comment on Matt. xviii. 17. This view of the disputed passage, I would particularly commend to the attention of those, who, like Mr. Brown, the learned

vindicator of Established Presbytery, consider the word "church" here to mean the *rulers* of the church *alone*.

A complaint was to be made by one part of the church at Jerusalem against another part. Now it is important to observe the mode of proceeding. To whom was the complaint made?—Was our Lord's rule complied with?—We may conclude it was. Then it appears, the meaning of his injunction is, that the *pastors* of the church should be first informed; for the complainants proceed, first of all, to the apostles, who then acted in a pastoral capacity. Inspired men as they were, did they forthwith take counsel, and settle the matter among themselves definitively, and give forth their sentence? No: *the church must be told*. Accordingly, "the *whole* multitude,"—the complainants, and all who were not immediately concerned, were summoned by the apostles to a church-meeting. The church is then told of the affair by the apostles, acting as the elders of the church more particularly in this case, yet, at the same time, bearing the character of inspired men. They direct the church what to do; and their proposal being well pleasing to the multitude, *they* perform the part which belongs to them,—the exercise of a church-privilege,—the right of *choice*, as to the persons and qualifications of those who were to be over

them in the way of rule and management. Here, however, their privilege was bounded. The induction into office,—the ministerial communication of authority to exercise that office, to which they had been chosen, lay in those who were already in office. It was a formal, public, and solemn act, visibly demonstrated by certain outward signs: which being done, the constitution of the persons so ordained was complete. Each had a proper part to act. “Do you *choose*, and we will *appoint*.” The people brought the objects of their choice to the gate, and the pastors opened it, and led the candidates in. The *choice* of church-officers lies with the whole church: the *appointment* with those already in office. According to the phrase of the New-England platform, herein is “a conjunction of *power* and *privilege*,” sweetly blended together. This may be observed in various places of the New Testament; but, as to the ministerial source of authority in the elders’ office, it is clear, from scripture, that *no ordination to office was ever made by the multitude*. It came by means of the apostles, or their associates. Timothy is enjoined to “commit the things delivered by the apostle, to faithful men, who should be able to teach others also.”—Titus was left in Crete, “to ordain elders in every city.” A pastor of Christ’s church holds his office immediately under him,

“ the Chief Shepherd,” and to him he is accountable. But the ministerial induction into this office appears, from scripture, not to reside in the multitude, but in the presbytery or eldership.

3. This authority is not legislative, but ministerial.

Were we to derive our ideas of the authority of Christ's ministers from Ecclesiastical History in general, we should certainly be disposed to take the converse of this proposition as the truth. We have abundant proof in creeds, and articles, and councils, that this authority is considered as invested with an unlimited *legislative* power. From this error have proceeded all the cruel and disgraceful persecutions, which stain the page of history, and cause humanity to weep ; an error more of the *heart* than of the understanding, and one that accords too readily with the pride and selfishness of human domination.

We have several instances on record, wherein our blessed Lord rebuked the tendency to ambitious usurpation in his disciples. And the apostles, Peter and Paul, by their exhortations and their doctrine, as well as by example, follow out the injunction of their Divine Master, against *lordship* in his church. The Apostle Paul rather refrains from exercising his full

powers as an apostle, and urges his authority, only when the contempt or neglect of it made it necessary. "We are your servants," says he, "for Jesus sake." Peter exhorts the elders to "feed the flock,"—"not *lording* it over God's heritage, but as ensamples to the flock." The eldership is an honourable and responsible office, instituted by Christ, for the welfare of his church;—not, certainly, to procure them dominion, and homage, and emolument, and ease; but to fulfil his holy will in guiding the flock, redeemed by his "precious blood," to the blissful pastures above. The authority of the elders, therefore, is *ministerial*, and may be considered in a two-fold view.

First, In stating, explaining, and enforcing, by argument and persuasion, the known will of Christ.

Secondly, In taking the sense of the church on any doubtful point, after mature deliberation; (wherein their opinion and advice have their proper influence;) and acting as the organs of the church, in executing its decisions.

In the *first* case, if a majority be against the declared will of Christ, after it be made known to them, that will give occasion for expostulation or reproof, which, if not attended to, will naturally oblige a faithful minister to withdraw.* In the *second* case, as it refers to the

* I am acquainted with a worthy minister of the gospel,

subject of prudence and expediency, a minister may, generally, have reason to suppose, that, in the collective wisdom of the church, there may be, at least, as much as is equal to his own: and, unless he be infallible in judgment, or imagine that *his will* is to be the law, and his individual opinion, the only measure of either judgment or conduct, he will be disposed rather to yield, in a doubtful point, to the sense of the majority,—supposing it respectable. To yield, in such a case, will not lessen his authority: he is still the organ of the church in executing its decisions, even supposing them contrary to his own views. In such a situation, he is only like the mayor of a corporation, presenting an address to the throne, on a point wherein his own judgment differs from those, whose minister he is. In this case, if a church know its duty, it will not consider a majority, opposed to the opinion and advice of a pastor, as a deduction from his just authority; but, on the contrary, his yielding may tend, as it certainly should, to increase their esteem; and, therefore, they may be expected, in return, to yield due obedience to him, in respect to the known will of Christ, as the minister of God, requiring them, in the name of their

who has lately signified to the church of which he is the pastor, that, unless they will consent to maintain a stricter discipline, he must resign his charge.

common Lord and Master, to fulfil his commands.

Nor will a faithful minister usurp the place of his Master, by wishing to establish his own will as the law of the church; but, keeping in view the odious character of Diotrophes, he will be disposed rather to unite his flock, by the example of his own moderation and tenderness, than to take advantage, at every turn, even of his indisputable authority. He will learn first to "rule his own house well," and he will transfer all the wisdom, and firmness, and affection, of a parent to the church of God.

III. By whom are elders chosen?

Not by the magistrate: for his office is not of a spiritual nature, and is not recognised by scripture in the church of Christ. The only sword to be used there, is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." The authority of the magistrate in religion being, for the most part, given up by those who renounce the connexion between the church and the state, it is not necessary to examine this topic here. The Congregationalists of New-England laid down a principle, which, in fact, involved in it the nature of an ecclesiastical establishment: viz. that, "It is the duty of the magistrate to take care of matters of religion:" and, "to put

forth his coercive power, if any church shall grow schismatical," &c.—(See Platform, chap. xix. sect. 6, 9.) But this part of their system we are not disposed to defend.

The authority of the magistrate in the church of Christ, I shall dismiss, by quoting the concessions of three eminent writers on these points.

Calvin thus speaks on this subject, in the fourth book of his Institutes.

"Those who imagine that the primitive state of the church was but temporary, seeing that the magistrate was, at that time, a stranger to the profession of our religion, are mistaken; for they do not consider the distinction and dissimilarity between the civil and the ecclesiastical authority: since the church doth not possess the power of the sword, either to punish, or restrain, or force: it cannot shut up any one in prison, or inflict any other punishment, as the magistrate is wont to do." *

"The suitableness of this government to the

* "Nam quod nonnulli omnia illa temporaria fuisse imaginantur, quum magistratus à religionis nostræ professione alieni adhuc forent: in eo falluntur, quod non animadvertunt quantum sit discrimen, et quævis dissimilitudo ecclesiasticæ et civitis potestatis. Neque enim jus gladii habet ecclesia, quo puniat vel coerceat; non imperium ut cogat, non carcerem, non pœnas alias quæ solent infligi à magistratu."

Calvini Instit. lib. iv. xi. 3.

churches," says Bishop Stillingfleet, "lay in the conveniency of it for the attaining all ends of government, in that condition, wherein the churches were at that time. For church-officers, acting then either in *gathering* or *governing* churches, without any authority from magistrates, such a way was most suitable to their several churches, as whereby the churches might be governed, and yet have no dependency upon the secular; which the way of government in the synagogues was most convenient for." *

"What I say," observes Locke, "concerning the mutual toleration of private persons, differing from one another in religion, I understand, also, of particular churches, which stand as it were in the same relation to each other, as private persons among themselves; nor has any one of them any manner of jurisdiction over any other, no, not even when the civil magistrate (as it sometimes happens) comes to be of this or the other communion: for the civil government can give no new right to the church, nor the church to the civil government. So that, whether the magistrate join himself to any church, or separate from it, the church remains always as it was before,—a free and voluntary society: it neither acquires the power of the sword, by the

* Stillingfleet's *Irenicum*, page 260.

magistrate's coming to it, nor does lose the right of instruction and excommunication, by his going from it." *

2. *The choice of elders is not in themselves:* for, even the apostles did not arbitrarily set over the churches whom they would:

3. *Nor is it in patrons.* The practice of disposing of the spiritual interests of a certain number of individuals, together with the exacted emoluments of a spiritual office, and considering it as so much *property*,—as part of the goods and chattels of a patron, whereby one thousand or ten thousand souls are made dependent on one person; (and he not often the fittest to choose and appoint a minister of the gospel;) and those souls transferred from hand to hand, just according to the caprice or the interests of a patron, and his friends or customers; is, surely, a practice, not originating with our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles: and as to the *edification* and *expediency* of it,—experience will afford a direct and easy answer.

4. *Nor is the choice of elders in occasional or stated hearers.* Many do, indeed, imagine, that the mere circumstance of attending a place of worship,—especially for any considerable length of time, together with their contribu-

* Locke's Letter concerning Toleration. Works, vol. ii. page 238. (folio.)

tions towards the support of the worship of God, is sufficient to *entitle* them to a voice in the election of church-officers.

It may be *expedient* and *courteous*, we acknowledge, to ask the opinion and the concurrence of such individuals, in such matters; but, until the distinction between a *church*, and a *congregation* can be pointed out in the New Testament, and the *rights* and privileges of a *congregation*, thus distinguished from a *church*, can be evinced from the sacred record, all such *claims* will be treated by enlightened and consistent christians as futile. The scripture recognises no *body*, no *individuals*, as possessing church-rights and privileges, but those who are of the church; nor is it natural or reasonable that it should. For what should we say of any person or persons, who, not being members of the House of Commons, or the Privy Council, should yet claim a share in the election of the speaker or the president? The same decency must surely be observed in the church of God.

5. It follows of course, according to our preceding arguments, that the *choice* of church-officers lies alone with the members of a particular church.

From the previous inquiry, respecting the officers of the church of Christ, we find, that, with regard to *the number of kinds*, it cannot be established from scripture and the earliest anti-

quity, that there were more than *two*, intended for the church in perpetuity, *viz. the bishop*, and *the deacon* ; and that the third office of *lay-elder*, as maintained by Presbyterians, and, at least, the early Congregationalists, is merged in the office of deacon, and properly belongs to it. In this respect, therefore, the sentiments of Independents, in general, appear more correct with regard to the number of kinds of church-officers ; though, perhaps, they have yet to learn, how to blend the duties of the lay-elder of the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists in the character of the deacon.

With regard to the *authority of elders*, we must conclude, that the sentiments of the genuine Congregationalist are more in harmony with scripture, than those of the Presbyterian and the Independent ; since, the Congregationalist endeavours to adjust and preserve the nice balance of "*power and privilege*," between the elders and the church : while, in the other cases, though in opposite respects, both power and privilege are cast into one scale ; the Presbyterian claiming too much for the elder, and the Independent denying him his just due.

And, lastly, with regard to the choice of church-officers, as it is a popular right, the Independents, chiefly, have the advantage of scripture authority on their side. Those Presbyterians and Congregationalists, who would

vest this choice in the magistrate, or in any other party, save the particular church to which the choice relates, are for depriving the people of God of an ancient and invaluable privilege, which they are bound to redeem and to preserve.

CHAPTER V.

The relation of the churches to each other.

THE principal difference between Presbytery and Independency, as before observed, consists in the aristocracy and the democracy of their church-governments. In strict Independency the voice of the people determines every thing, and the decision of the majority in a church, admits of no appeal: every church stands distinct by itself, and unrelated to any other church; nor is there any thing like "obedience to them that have the rule over them."

In Presbytery the people have no voice. Every church-act, in the way of government, is performed by a few to whose judgment and will the many are subject. No one church can manage its own affairs,—they are all managed *for* them, and, if aggrieved, they have only an appeal, which may be carried to a distant court, and be judged of to a great disadvantage.

In the scripture a medium is observed between these extremes.

The competency of each particular church to manage its own affairs in general, and of its officers to minister and rule therein, according to the scriptures, is apparent throughout the New Testament; and especially from what the Apostle says to the Corinthians; "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person." He expected them to have done this without his interference. And his letters being addressed to the churches, rather than to their ministers, bespeaks their competency to deliberate in an individual capacity. On the other hand, we have to see, whether there is not a provision made for the unity of the churches in faith and order, by a mutual watchfulness, sympathy, and care. That the churches do stand related to one another, as parts of a great whole, as members of one redeemed family, and one general assembly, hereafter to meet in heaven, there can be no doubt. "We being many," says the Apostle, "are one body." And to the churches of Galatia; "Ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

The question is, Under what *form* does this union subsist, and what are the *duties* arising out of it?

In answer to the first inquiry, we reply, There is *a local and neighbourly association of churches, uniting, by common consent, for the ends proposed.*

This appears clear from the Epistle to the Galatians, wherein the Apostle seems to incorporate them into a local association, united by common interests and common ties, by denominating them "*the churches of Galatia*," as he does, elsewhere, by speaking of "*the churches of Judea*," and "*the churches of Macedonia*." The brethren were addressed in this local incorporated character, and in it they acted. Let us view, for a moment, the instance of the churches of Galatia. There had been among them a general defection from the truth of the gospel. We do not know that all the churches, without exception, had been tainted with the error: from the language used, we should rather think not: the Apostle intimates that some had not fallen from the doctrines of grace. "Christ is become of no effect unto you, *whosoever* of you are justified by the law."—Yet this admonitory epistle was addressed to them all.

A practical epistle of this nature was surely intended to be followed up by some practical effects. A letter addressed to all naturally required an answer *from* all. But in order to do this, the local association must come into exercise,—the churches of Galatia must somehow meet together, and arrange the contents of their answer:—they must come to some united determination, as to what they believed, and what

they would do. One thing they were to do was, to "cut off those who troubled them." When they had done so, they would inform the Apostle that his intimation and advice had been complied with. To do so in a common letter, was to do a common act. *It was the act of the ASSOCIATED CHURCHES OF GALATIA.*

The same line of argument may be adopted, with regard to another precept relative to discipline. "Brethren," says the Apostle, "if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye who are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness." And again; "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ;"* This implies that the associated churches were to take a mutual interest in each other; to watch over one another to do good, "especially to them who were of the household of faith,"—the great family of Christ Jesus in Galatia, and elsewhere throughout the world.

We find, also, in the business of making a collection for the poor saints in Judea, that the Apostle gave "order to the churches of Galatia" for every one, upon the first day of the week, to lay by him in store; that when the Apostle came, "there might be no gatherings."† Now, unless there had been a common treasurer, appointed by the churches, there must have been very extensive gatherings in

* Gal. vi. 1, 2. † 1 Cor. xvi. 1.

the province of Galatia, and the Apostle would have been much detained on his journey. The pecuniary affairs, relative to the benevolence of the churches, were, therefore, transacted in an associated capacity.

The same may be said of the churches of Macedonia and Achaia. "Their bounty *was made up*," as the Apostle says, according to notice given; that "the same might be ready."*

Messengers were also appointed, as delegates from the churches to other churches. The Apostle speaks of a brother, who was "CHOSEN BY THE CHURCHES" to travel with him and his companions from Macedonia to Judea, with the contributions of the churches. This *choice of the churches* of Macedonia, is as clearly an associated act, as in the case of the churches of Galatia.

Another remarkable instance, tending to show the practical nature of this association, occurs in the case of the meeting in Jerusalem, on the question referred to the church there, by the church at Antioch. That the messengers did not merely represent the single church at Antioch, seems clear from the answer returned; viz. "To the brethren, which are of the Gentiles in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia:" and to them the Apostle went with the answer. (See Acts xv. 41.)

* 2 Cor. ix. 5.

As the transactions of this meeting at Jerusalem have been viewed in different lights, and have really had a most important influence, as an authority, in the history of the church of Christ, it may be proper to consider, a little more at large, the circumstances of the case.

The question raised is, Was this an inspired meeting or not? Mr. Brown, in his vindication of Presbytery, affirms that it was uninspired, and that it affords a model for the Presbyterian way. Mr. Carson, in answer to Mr. Brown, (Letter x.) pronounces the meeting altogether extraordinary and inspired; and argues, that it is no rule for our proceedings in church affairs. This I am not disposed to admit. And yet if Mr. Brown's premises should be allowed to be true, his conclusion by no means follows. That the meeting was not what we may call an extraordinary and inspired meeting, appears to me to be the fact from the following considerations.

First. It does not bear the marks of an inspired meeting on the face of it. We find no sudden and extraordinary revelations communicated by the Holy Ghost to any one, nor any outward sign to attest the words of any one speaker: on the contrary, we find there was "much disputing," arising from a difference of opinion among some of the church, of the sect of the Pharisees.

Secondly. The question was argued and debated in a rational manner, and a conclusion unanimously adopted on the grounds brought forward in the debate. The sacred writer says,

1st. On the arrival of Paul and Barnabas at Jerusalem, a general meeting was called, consisting of the apostles and elders, with the whole church.

2ndly. That they came to "*consider*" of this matter; to look into the case: (*ἀνι*) for, as it appears from the sentiments of the believing Pharisees, the case had not yet come broadly before them. So that even at Jerusalem, as well as at Antioch, when the question was started, there was room for a great difference of opinion.

3rdly. Hence, when they met, a pretty warm and long debate immediately took place: but, as it appears, without producing much satisfaction. At length Peter rose up, and delivered a short but pithy speech, wherein he reminded the assembly of the fact that had occurred a considerable time before, in the conversion of the Gentiles through him;—referring, in all probability, to Cornelius and his family, with others, who had received the miraculous gifts of the Spirit at the time, although in a state of *uncircumcision*; thereby establishing the doctrine, which, before this, even Peter himself

did not understand, that "neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love;" and, that, as the Holy Ghost had thus put "no difference" between the circumcised and the uncircumcised, it was wrong to "put a yoke upon the neck" of the Gentile converts, which, by themselves as Jews, had been found insupportable.

A very favourable impression was thus produced on the meeting by this sensible and pertinent speech; for "*the whole multitude*" then "kept silence," and very attentively listened to the interesting narrative of Barnabas and Paul, wherein they told of the miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them; thus confirming, by a long induction of undeniable facts, the doctrine and the conclusion of the former speaker. Having finished their narration, James, an apostle highly venerated by the whole church at Jerusalem, arose and requested a hearing. Following up the impression now made on the minds of the hearers, he strengthens the argument of his brother Peter, by quoting a very suitable and conclusive passage from the Prophets, whereby it was shown to have been the intention of God, ages before, to incorporate the uncircumcised Gentiles into the christian church. Wherefore, he also draws a conclusion from the premises so completely proved and esta-

blished ; and delivers his solemn and decided sentence or judgment (*αποφασισμός*) on the case in hand.

The debate, therefore, which began in confusion, by this wise management, was thus happily brought to an issue ; so that conviction seemed to settle on every mind, and was productive of the most harmonious and unanimous act and deed. “ Then pleased it the apostles and elders, *with the whole church*, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch, with Paul and Barnabas,” and by them letters, containing the decision of the meeting.

Thirdly. That is was to obtain advice and the best opinion on the important subject in hand, that the church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem ; and *not to obtain a revelation of the Spirit*, is clear, because Paul, at least, was inspired as much as Peter and James, or any one at Jerusalem, and was as well qualified to give an inspired decision. But it seems to have been the will of God, that this occurrence should take place, in order to show the nature of the relation of churches to each other ; and to instruct them how to decide a doubtful matter, arising in a particular church : that, where a church with its elders, after using all the powers and helps which they possess, are, after all, unable to come to an agreement, they may and ought to seek the assistance of

other churches, whose superier wisdom, or information, or experience, with the blessing of God, may afford them a sound and satisfactory opinion.

Fourthly. From the contents of their letter of advice, it appears, that a part, at least, of the sentence was not irreversible. James proposes something for the observance of the Gentiles, which seems to have been derived from the Mosaic law, and to have arisen from his feelings and habits as a Jew, to which the multitude, which was Jewish also, would readily assent; and which, though more enlightened, the apostle Paul, unwilling to disturb the harmony of the meeting, by introducing a further discussion on points not fundamental, would not be inclined to oppose. James proposes to advise the Gentiles to "abstain from things strangled, and from blood." That such advice was not in perfect accordance with the spirit of the gospel dispensation, and was adapted only to an infantile state of the church, appears from the doctrine of the apostle Paul, who says, "I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself."* Again; "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God

* Rom. xiv. 14.

and prayer.”* And, finally; “Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake.”† Now, if this decree was inspired, in the proper sense of the term, the two apostles would not be found to maintain sentiments so much at variance with each other.

To these arguments it will be objected, that the contents of the letter of the church show that their decision was truly and properly inspired: for it is said, “It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.” &c. And, further, that the decisions of the meeting are called “*decrees*.” (Acts xvi. 4.)

To this we answer,

1st. That this phraseology must be made to agree with the character of the meeting, which we have proved not to possess the marks of inspiration.

2dly. That the letter does not claim the particular authority of the Holy Ghost, for the decision respecting circumcision; but rather contents itself with denying the authority of those persons who had gone to Antioch, “subverting the souls of the disciples.”

3dly. That what is enjoined on the disciples, as of inspired authority, relates to matters

* 1 Tim.^e iv. 4, 5. † 1 Cor. x. 25.

about which there was, apparently, no dispute at Antioch, viz. "abstaining from meats offered to idols." &c. &c.

4thly. That even this inspired authority does not appear to arise out of any particular revelation of the Spirit to this meeting; but is rather mentioned as the conclusion of their arguments and discussions, whereby they had discovered the mind of the Spirit from the Old Testament scriptures: or, according to Dr. Whitby, *in locum*, "the reason why the council here assembled use these words, is not because they challenged to themselves any infallible assistance of the Holy Ghost in their conventions, rather than in their dispersions, but only upon this account, because the Holy Ghost had by a miracle declared the truth of what they had then decreed; that is, by falling down upon Cornelius, and his friends, and his kinsfolk, who were Romans, and only proselytes of the gate at most; and so not circumcised," &c.

5thly. The application of the term "*decrees*" (*δευματα*) to the decision of this synod, does, by no means, prove it to have been an extraordinary meeting, which is not to be copied by the church in subsequent times: for, taken in connexion with all we have said, the term must surely be considered to mean no more than the solemn and final determination of a

meeting, specially convened to consider an important question. This decision carried with it, undoubtedly, a certain *authority*: it was the decision of competent judges, who had been applied to for advice and assistance by the parties interested: it came from the fountain-head of christianity,—from the mother-church; and was the result of their united wisdom and experience. It was, therefore, well calculated to check the false doctrine of the Jewish zealots, and to comfort and satisfy the minds of the Gentile converts: as such it would be respected. And is there any thing in this unsuitable to the present day? Might not a doubtful matter be referred by us to our neighbours, with a similar advantage? Do we not, in fact, make the same kind of appeal, when we publish to the world, by means of the press, those disputes which arise in churches, and those controversial differences, which occur in matters of faith and discipline; and are we not anxious to obtain a favourable verdict from the public at large? And, if the public approve our sentiments, do we not consider the matter as decided, and do we not rest satisfied with the *authority*, which public opinion gives to our case?

I see nothing, therefore, which will not well agree with this conclusion respecting the meeting at Jerusalem, that it was *not* an extraordi-

nary and inspired meeting, which we have no right to imitate. It seems to me that it was really intended as a model for us in similar cases, whereby we may obtain assistance and satisfaction: and, if so, that this instance of connexion between Antioch, Syria, Cilicia, and Jerusalem, goes to establish the general principle of a settled local association of churches, as well as of a special convocation.

From this induction of scripture evidence, therefore, it appears that christians and christian churches are not insulated from each other, without a common interest, without sympathy, without connexion, without order. The same kind of relation subsists between churches, as between individual members. "All the members," and all the churches, are to have "the same care one of another;" and, "whether one member," or one church "suffer, all the members," and all the churches, "suffer with it: or one member," or church, "be honoured, all the members," and churches, "rejoice with it:"* —a sentiment addressed by the Apostle, not to the Corinthians alone, but to "all that in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord." "Christ is not divided." We are all "the body of Christ, and members in particular:" each has his place and his duties. Order

* 1 Cor. xii. 26.

is the very life of the christian body. When the natural body is materially disordered, it decays and dies. A healthful, vigorous, orderly procedure of the business and duties of the christian body, in respect both to churches and to individuals, is the life of the christian cause. Who will condemn these inquiries, then, as trivial and unprofitable: and who will plead for that proud, cold-hearted, selfish, unsocial spirit, which severs the churches from each other; bids all sympathy, all admonition, all inquiry, all advice stand aloof; strong in its own sufficiency, and indifferent whether others stand or fall, whether they are grieved or pleased, honoured or reproached; too high-minded to seek counsel in time of difficulty, or aid in time of distress; and scorning, with a proud and jealous eye, the kind solicitude of a neighbour and a brother? This unamiable and anti-christian spirit may be denominated "standing fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free;" but we venture to assert, that the Apostle never contemplated the destruction of christian fellowship, when he taught the Galatians to resist the attempts of the Jews, in their endeavours to impose upon them the yoke of Levitical ceremonies: he does not, surely, intend to contradict himself;—or rather, the Holy Spirit does not design to break that

"unity of the Spirit," and that "bond of peace," which he uniformly inculcates.

On this interesting subject, I shall convey my sentiments more forcibly, by adopting the language of an estimable friend, the Rev. Dr. Wardlaw, in a sermon preached by him on occasion of the meeting of the Congregational Union for Scotland, May, 1817. "To every attentive reader of the New Testament, there must forcibly present itself the idea of a union more extensive than that subsisting among the members of each christian society; even a union among *all the churches*:—such a union as rendered a member of one, virtually a member of all; the whole of them in Judea and Samaria, in Asia and in Europe,—“from Jerusalem, round about unto Illyricum,”—being linked together in one extensive and harmonious brotherhood; independent societies, yet acknowledging one another, as “all one in Christ Jesus;”—separate flocks, each with its own appropriate pastors, but all the joint property, and the constant and equal care of “the good Shepherd, who gave his life for the sheep.”

“The heart that is not charmed with such a view, cannot surely be in harmony with the spirit of the New Testament. To every mind that has been framed, under divine influence, upon the principles of the gospel of peace, and that is not

warped and narrowed by unhappy prejudices, it cannot fail to appear unspeakably delightful, and supremely desirable:—every departure from it must be deeply lamented, and every approach to it must be hailed with more than satisfaction, and promoted with all the ardour of affectionate zeal. While, therefore, we plead, distinctly and decidedly, for the independence of the churches, as a fundamental principle in their primitive constitution, let us beware of running to an unscriptural extreme,—of so completely disuniting and insulating them from one another, as to present to view a number of christian societies, each in itself thoroughly organized, but without any bond, or feeling, or act of mutual connexion:—so that, instead of the lovely harmony of reciprocal confidence, and friendly intercourse, we should behold each church, like a separate fortress, surrounded with its walls and ramparts, with spies on the battlements, and sentinels at the gates, watching, with anxious jealousy, to prevent the entrance of intruders from the rest. If it be at all probable that any disciple should relish such a state of things, or entertain a single wish for any thing resembling it, let him never mention his desire to see christians returning to primitive simplicity and apostolic order: for, in truth, that to which his wishes are directed, is as unlike the condition of the

churches in the times of the apostles, as division is to unity, or hatred and hostility to affection and peace. His desire, were it gratified, would realize a scene, which we cannot too devoutly deprecate, and to which it would be our duty to submit,—“no not for an hour.”

The principle of union, association, and intercourse, now contended for, was admitted and acted upon, as far as circumstances would admit, in the first ages of christianity; and has, in a measure, generally been maintained, under different forms, to the present day. Antiquity, however, furnishes us with little or no light, as to the existence of those local associations, by which the unity of the churches of Christ was at first preserved. We have accounts of synods and councils wherein the principle is acknowledged; but history records not, probably, even the first of these. The synods of Rome, Carthage, France, and Palestine, in the second and third centuries, can hardly be supposed to be the first of the kind. Nor is it material to be unable to trace exactly the history of local associations of churches, when we find the principle, and we think also the fact, of their existence, in the Scripture itself. We shall pass over the reference to antiquity, therefore, with quoting the words of Lord Chancellor King: “Every church was, in this sense, independent; i. e. without the con-

currence and authority of any other church, it had a sufficient right and power in itself to punish and chastise all its delinquent and offending members. But yet, in another sense, it was dependent, as considered with other churches, as part of the church universal. A particular church was not the whole church of Christ, but only a part or member of the universal one; and, as one member of the natural body hath a regard to all the other members thereof, so a particular church, which was but one member of the universal, had relation and respect to the other members thereof. Hence, though the labours and inspections of the Bishops were more peculiarly confined to their own parishes, yet, as ministers of the church universal, they employed a general kind of inspection over other churches also, observing their condition and circumstances, and giving unto them an account of their own state and posture.”*

After so long and dreary a night, during which the church slumbered and dreamed of “all monstrous, all prodigious things,” it is not to be wondered at, that, on its awaking, it should almost have forgotten its former self. However, it is most certain, that, on the point

* Inquiry, page 128.

now in hand, the puritans and non-conformists were pretty generally agreed.

Dr. Ames, as the mouth of his brethren and the churches, speaks as follows: "They (the congregationalists) affirm, that Christ has not placed any one church under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of another, but that it is accountable to him alone for its acts. Hence, if any church shall err altogether in matters of faith and piety, they deny that the same power exists, *jure divino*, in other churches, or the rulers of other churches, to chastise and restrain, as is granted to a particular church. It is the duty of churches, however, to assist other churches by *advice* and *admonition*, that they may watch against contagion in others, as well as in themselves."†

On this point some of the most eminent of the early Independents, who ranked with the Brownists, entertained similar views. The learned and pious Henry Ainsworth, in a Treatise on the Communion of Saints, chap. xxiv. thus speaks of the communion of churches:—

"From these few examples, compared with the former general duties of all Christians, may appear how churches owe help, comfort,

† Harum esse consilio admonitionibusque juvare alios, etiam ut sibimet de contagione prospiciant; monere; et cæt:

De Ecclesia, cap. ii. §. 3.

and refreshing, one to another, as they have need and ability; and should not one envy or vex another; but, as Ephraim and Judah, flee together upon the shoulders of the common enemy, yet avoiding both ambition and confusion. For, although we may advise, exhort, warn, reprove, &c., so far as christian love and power extendeth; yet find we no authority committed to one congregation over another, for excommunicating the same, as every church hath over her own members. Christ reserveth this power in his own hand, to remove the candlesticks out of their places, if they sin, and repent not. And he, in his Epistles to the Seven Churches, dealeth with every one of them severally, for their own estate and faults, not imputing the sins of one unto another; though the admonitions given to every one were to be a warning to all churches, even whosoever had an ear to hear. Neither may members disorderly run from church to church, which may work trouble and confusion; for avoiding whereof, in the apostles' days, letters of commendation were written for such as by occasion travelled to other places, that they might be esteemed and received as brethren; as, on the contrary, false teachers, heretics, excommunicates, and such like, be shunned and avoided."

The platform of the New-England churches

exhibits the same doctrine: “ Although churches be *distinct*, and therefore may not be *confounded* one with another; and *equal*, and therefore have not *dominion* one over another; yet *all the churches ought to preserve church-communion* one with another, because they are all united unto Christ, not only as a mystical, but as a political Head; whence is derived a communion suitable thereto.”*

The persons who professed this doctrine, established a local association of elders and brethren, which met regularly in synod and presbytery. The presbyterial meeting took place once in six weeks; or, if needful, more frequently. The synod was held annually.

A similar practice was adopted in Worcestershire by Mr. Baxter and others, together with their churches, in Kidderminster and the neighbourhood, with great advantage to good order. (See Calamy’s *Life of Baxter*, vol. i. page 117.)

This doctrine was held, moreover, by the Savoy Meeting in 1658. In the preface to the declaration, drawn up by Dr. John Owen, in the name of the meeting, it is said; “ This accord of our’s hath fallen out without having held any correspondency together, or prepared consultation, by which we might come to be

* See Platform, chap. xv.

advised of one another's minds. We allege not this as a matter of commendation in us ; no, we acknowledge it to have been a great neglect ; and, accordingly, one of the first proposals for union among us, was, " that there might be a constant correspondence held among the churches for counsel and mutual edification, for time to come, to prevent the like omission."

" We confess, that, from the first, every, or at least the generality, of our churches, have been, in a manner, like so many ships, (though holding forth the same general colours,) launched singly, and sailing apart and alone in the vast ocean of these tumultuating times ; and they, exposed to every wind of doctrine, under no other conduct than the word and Spirit, and their particular elders and principal brethren without associations among themselves, or so much as holding out common lights to others, whereby to know where they were.

" But yet, while we thus confess, to our own shame, this neglect, let all acknowledge that God has ordered it for his high and greater glory ; in that, his singular care and power should have so watched over each of these, as that all should be found to have steered their course by the same chart, and to have been bound for one and the same port ; and that

upon this general search now made, the same holy and blessed truths of all sorts, which are current and warrantable among all the other churches of Christ in the world, should be found to be our lading." *

The twenty-fifth article of their declaration runs thus: "As all churches, and all the members of them, are bound to pray continually for the good and prosperity of all the churches of Christ, in all places; and upon all occasions to further it,—every one within the bounds of their places and callings, in the exercise of their gifts and graces,—so the churches themselves, when planted by the providence of God, so as that they may have opportunity and advantage for it,—ought to hold communion amongst themselves, for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification."

Such were the sentiments of the Congregational churches in England in 1658.

The same kind of declaration was made by the Presbyterians and Independents of London and its vicinity, when united in the year 1690: Among other things set forth in their deed of union, touching the communion of churches, there is this clause:—"We agree that we are most willing and ready to give an account of our church proceedings to each other, when de-

* Preface to the Savoy Declaration, page xv.

sired, for preventing or removing any offences that may arise among us. Likewise, we shall be ready to give the right hand of fellowship, and walk together according to the gospel rules of communion of churches."*

About the same period a similar declaration was made by the Presbyterians and Independents of the West of England.

The statements and reasonings of Dr. Owen on this subject in his treatise "Of the true nature of a gospel church and its government," seem to be undeniable. His sentiment is this: "The union of all churches before described in one head, by one Spirit, through one faith and worship, unto the same ends, doth so compact them into one body mystical, as that none of them is or can be complete absolutely, without a joint acting with other members of the same body, unto the common good of the whole, as occasion doth require. And this joint acting with others in any church, can be no otherwise, but by common advice and counsel, which natural circumstances render impossible by any means, but their convention in synods, by their messengers and delegates. For, although there may be some use of letters missive, and was so eminently in the primitive churches, to

* Article IV. Heads of Agreement, &c. in Calamy's Life of Baxter, page 480. vol. i.

ask the advice of one another in difficult cases ; (as the first instance we have of communion of churches, after the days of the apostles, is in the letter of the church of Corinth unto that of Rome, desiring their advice about the composing of a difference among them, and the answer of the church of Rome thereunto;) yet many cases may fall out among them, which cannot be reconciled or determined, but by present conference, such as that recorded, Acts xv. No church, therefore, is so independent as that it can always, and in all cases, observe the duties it owes unto the Lord Christ, and the church catholic, by all those powers which it is able to act in itself distinctly, without conjunction with others. And the church that confines its duty unto the acts of its own assemblies, cuts itself off from the external communion of the church catholic ; nor will it be safe for any man to commit the conduct of his soul to such a church." *

In illustration of the nature and practical effect of the union and association now pleaded for, we refer to the letter addressed by several of the Congregational ministers of London, (at the head of whom were Dr. Goodwin, Dr. Owen, Mr. Caryl, &c.) to the Congregational churches of New-England, in the year 1669,

* See Owen on a Gospel Church, chapter xi.

on occasion of the punishment of some fanatics and others, who greatly disturbed the peace of the colony. The London ministers were scandalised at the infliction of a temporal punishment on a religious account; and, in a very affectionate and faithful epistle, remonstrate with their trans-atlantic brethren, concluding thus: "We only make it our hearty request to you, that you would trust God with his truths and ways, so far, as to suspend all rigorous proceedings in corporal restraints or punishments on persons that dissent from you, and practise the principle of their dissent, without danger or disturbance to the civil peace of the place." (See Mather's History of New-England, book vii. chap. 4.) This "excellent letter," as it is justly styled by Dr. Mather, produced, at length, its intended effect. The just principles of religious liberty were publicly acknowledged; the limits of civil magistracy were defined; and heresy was suffered to die a natural death.

The principle of local associations among elders and churches, being thus established, from scripture and the concurring testimony and practice of the majority of pious and learned men in the two connexions, it only remains for us to draw the conclusion, that it is the will of God, that the churches of Christ should be firmly united together; and the closer their

attachment and communion, surely the more acceptable to him ! " What our hands find to do, we are to do with our might." Our mutual attachment ought not to be cold or equivocal. We ought to " love one another with a pure heart fervently."

It is true, bad men have availed themselves of this attachment, this unity of the churches, to promote their worldly designs, or to gratify their base passions : but in the union we plead for, it would be as much the duty of the churches, to watch against any thing *arbitrary*, either in ministers or people, as to contribute aid in times of distress. Any arbitrary proceeding, tending to an invasion of christian liberty, would draw forth some remonstrance, some protest, some resistance, which would serve to check the usurpation. Let it be fully understood, that the Congregationalist contends as earnestly for the right of every particular church to manage its own affairs, as the strictest Independent. And, were any synod or assembly to legislate, in any instance, for a particular church, and attempt to impose their laws by any penal sanction, the Congregationalist, according to his declared principles, would protest against the proceeding. Herein he differs from the Presbyterian, who considers a presbytery or synod to have authority over every individual member of the particular

churches within their bounds. Hence, an act of these assemblies is as binding on the individual, as the act of a particular church :—nay more, because of the greater authority. A church, according to the Independent and the Congregationalist, hath power over every one of its members to retain or to cast out. Presbytery transfers this same power to a representative court of review, composed of the pastors and elders of several congregations : nor does it allow of the actual exercise of this power by any particular church in its members, but only in its officers.

From this view of the different systems, it appears, that the Presbyterian and the Independent, properly so called, are at greater extremes, than the Congregationalist is from either : and, to speak in dialectic phrase, if a *middle term* be wanted to join these extremes, it is to be found in the Congregational system. Which would be the more difficult task of the two, to persuade the Presbyterian to admit the voice of the people in their own affairs, whether in a particular church, or in a local association ; or to convince the Independent of the propriety of local associations of ministers and churches, for the purpose of appeal and inquiry, as well as for the spread of the gospel ; it would be invidious to determine : yet, there is something more plausible, I confess, in the

objections of the Independent than of the other; and there will remain, I fear, on his mind, after all we have said, a strong jealousy against that local superintendence which we advocate. He dreads the introduction of any authority whatever into such an association. He can see nothing but the *inquisitorial* and the *papal* power, in the very mention of the word *authority*; especially in the present case.

We respect this sensitive feeling in favour of the liberty of individual churches: at the same time we would suggest, that it may be indulged to an excess, very injurious to the true interest of churches and the gospel of Christ, and in opposition to his will. If it be admitted, as I think it must be, that a local association of churches of some kind is scriptural, then it must follow that in such an association, something must be done for the common benefit. That which is done for the common benefit, by the parties themselves interested, must certainly carry with it some kind of authority. Is *all* religious authority papal, and arbitrary, and inquisitorial? Surely a particular church has some kind of authority. It may elect its own officers and members, or exclude them. In doing so it exercises *authority*. Is this authority of necessity offensive? Again, there is a certain authority attached to the ministerial office: is this necessarily tyrannical? And

why may there not be a certain kind of authority possessed by an association of churches, (including of course their elders,) which is not of an offensive and injurious nature?

There are cases both of appeal and inquiry among churches, which loudly call for the interposition of those who may be best qualified to judge between the parties, and who will feel a brotherly interest in their affairs. The whole analogy of the New Testament, as well as the particular precepts and examples occurring therein, warrants this proceeding. If so, an appeal or inquiry must, of course, carry with it some kind of authority in the parties appealed to, or making the inquiry. Let us not start at the spectre of our own imagination. The word authority may be innocent or offensive, according to the nature of the thing for which it stands. Is there not, beside the authority which is lordly, overbearing, and arbitrary, the authority of wisdom and knowledge, of prudence and experience, of holiness, and love, and good-will? In these representatives of the divine nature, especially when accumulated and concentrated in an assemblage of good men, who give, by their uniform conduct, a pledge of their desire and endeavour to honour and glorify God and his Son, there is something reverend and impressive, as well as lovely and attractive. To such an authority, I

think, a christian may bow, in all things lawful, without detracting any thing from the duty which he owes to the Lord Christ, as "head over all things to the church:" on the contrary, in so doing he may be honouring his Saviour, in thus respecting the advice or the decision of the eminent servants of the Lord. And I should almost fear, the mind which revolts at *such* an authority, and refuses to abide by its decisions, would be equally insubordinate to any kind of church authority whatever.

But, after all, the strict Independent will insist upon it, that not even such an authority, good as it may in itself be, has any right to interfere in any case of church-discipline. Then it follows, of course, that no case will ever occur in a particular church, wherein disputes cannot be settled within itself;—none, wherein false teachers and bad men are suffered to flourish without rebuke, to the great scandal of religion, the corruption of the flock of Christ, and the sore grief of pious men. But such is not the fact. Many such cases, alas, do continually arise; and the more, we presume, for want of some power of appeal or inquiry. Are disputes then for ever to remain unsettled? Are churches to be rent and torn asunder by factions and divisions, without any friendly power to interpose its healing aid? Must churches be left to languish, and decay, and

die for want of neighbourly solace and support? Shall crafty and designing men triumph in their seductions of the young, the simple, and the unwary, without fear of any loud and united voice of reprobation and rebuke? Alas, then, for our Mount Zion! Alas, for the fold of Christ, in the latter days, when "iniquity shall abound, and the love of many shall wax cold!" Ah! why did the apostles and the evangelists die, and abandon the churches to the invasions of disorder and corruption, bereft of their local superintendence, their parental tenderness and solicitude, their prompt and faithful interposition? Well might we, with the Prophet, wish that our "head were waters, and our eyes a fountain of tears, that we might weep day and night" over the irremediable dissensions and corruptions of the churches, if the Lord Jesus has provided no substitute for apostolic care! Did we not know of a better resource, one of divine, and not of human expedience, we might embrace diocesan episcopacy, or papal authority, and suppose, that what it wanted of gospel purity and simplicity, was made up by venerable antiquity. But there is a better succession of the apostles. The churches, according to their convenience of situation, are put under each other's care. Each is his "brother's keeper." Mutual vigilance and support are made the duty of all. They are to be united by

a strong, indissoluble bond of faith and love. Even during the apostles' days, and under their superintendence and direction, this close, visible unity was cherished and matured ; of which we have a remarkable instance in the case of appeal, already commented on, in the affair between the churches of Antioch, Syria, Cilicia, and Jerusalem. Happily, therefore, and we ought to acknowledge it with devout and fervent gratitude, the church is not left without resource in similar cases ;—is not, in these remote ages, placed in more disadvantageous circumstances for its prosperity, than in the days of the apostles, and the evangelists, and the gifted saints !

Let it be well observed, that the gospel admits the great principles of *emulation* and *shame*, and gives them a most active operation, not only in the breasts of individuals, personally and singly considered, but also in the churches of Christ, as standing related to each other. These principles are inculcated by our Lord Christ himself, when he says ; “ Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called *the least* in the kingdom of heaven : but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called *great* in the kingdom of heaven.” *

* Matt. v. 19.

Again, if the offender “ will not hear the church, let him be to thee as a heathen man and a publican.”* The apostles, imbibing these lessons, apply them to the churches in a collective capacity. “ What is it,” says Paul to the Corinthians, “ wherein you were inferior to other churches, except it be, that, I myself was not burdensome to you?”† Again; “ We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth: so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God, for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure.”§ In the matter of the general contribution to the poor saints at Jerusalem, the Apostle, with consummate address, plies the operation of these two powerful principles of our nature, by bringing the churches of two separate, but neighbouring districts, Achaia and Macedonia, to bear upon each other. Thus he writes to those of Achaia: “ Show ye to them, (the messengers of the churches,) and before the churches, the proof of your love, and of our boasting on your behalf: for, as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know the forwardness of your mind,

* Matt. xviii. 17. † 2 Cor. xii. 13. § 2 Thess. i. 3, 4.

for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many. Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready: lest, haply, if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be *ashamed* in this same confident boasting.* Upon the same principle the Apostle works, when he says to the Thessalonians; "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us."—And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed: yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.†

This then is the kind of *force*, which our Lord has given his church for its purity and edification: and an association of churches, using this force lawfully, for the common good, is surely not to be cried down, as assuming an unscriptural and injurious *authority* over the liberty of the brethren.

Let it be remembered, it is an ASSOCIATION OF CHURCHES we plead for, not an as-

* 1 Cor. viii. 24. ix. 1, 4. † 2 Thess. iii. 6, 14, 15.

sociation of ministers only. This distinction, if well considered, will be found to neutralize every rational objection; for, by its very constitution, no principle can be admitted into such an association, which is not admitted in every individual church. In such an association every individual member has, or may have, a voice. Of course, it should be the care of the churches to exclude parties, and intrigues, and secret cabals. Such things, from the imperfections of good men, do gain admittance into the best institutions,—yea, even into those divinely constituted. It is an accident inseparable from this mixed and impure state of being: perfect freedom from it can be expected only in “the general assembly and church of the first-born in heaven.” No one, therefore, we shall hope, will argue against the use of a good thing, especially if scriptural, from the abuse to which it is liable; otherwise we must give up church-fellowship altogether.

The principle of association being once established on scriptural ground, the detail of its application will follow as a matter of prudence and expediency. The objects demanding the attention of the associated churches would naturally be the following:—

1. The purity of the churches in faith, order, and morality.

2. The peace and prosperity of the churches in communion.

3. The purity and competency of the ministerial character.

4. A provision for the succession of the ministry.

5. The relief of aged and infirm ministers, with their widows and children.

6. The spread of the gospel at home and abroad, and especially in their own vicinity.
Cum multis aliis.

Some of these objects, it is acknowledged, are liberally provided for in various places; but we submit, that, were the churches to adopt them as their own, and not leave them to the precarious efforts of individuals, it would not only be more primitive and scriptural, but really more effective. We are not indulging in reverie and curious speculation, nor proposing a novelty altogether dubious and untried. Congregationalism, we seriously believe to be the form of church-government portrayed in the New Testament; and it was the system acted on with success by our revered ancestors. It may be partially believed and practised among ourselves; but for the benefit of the churches, and the glory of our blessed Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ, my earnest desire is to see it fully revived and carried into active and extensive

operation. Then the churches, being "fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, would make increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." The hands of godly ministers would be supported, while bad ministers, and bad members, would tremble. "The sinners in Zion would be afraid; fearfulness would surprise the hypocrites." The too successful maxim of Satan's policy, *divide et impera*, *divide and conquer*, would be rendered useless; and our Lord's command, that we should all be *one*, would then be delightfully accomplished. Thus would the mouths of enemies be shut, and the world convinced of the truth and excellence of our holy religion.

Since orthodox, unestablished Presbytery, Congregationalism, and Independency, stand so closely related to each other;—approximate to one another in so many important points; and are each of so much numerical consequence in the religious world; how happy for themselves and the world, were they to unite, once more, on some such scriptural basis as that now laid down! And what really stands in the way? What impediment to union now exists, which did not, when these parties, both in England and America, conceded something to each other, and shook hands over their minor differences?

Let us but cherish a spirit of conciliation, and difficulties, which appeared insurmountable, will gradually give way. Dr. Cotton Mather, addressing his Presbyterian brethren on the subject of union, says; “ Such and so hath been our platform of church-discipline. If our brethren of the Presbyterian persuasion be still uneasy in any article of it, let these things be offered for a close :—

“ *First.* The Presbyterian ministers of this country do find it no difficulty to practise the substance of it in and with their several congregations; and when it comes to the *practice*, they do not find so much of difficulty as at first appeared in the *notion*.

“ *Secondly.* The reverend persons of the Presbyterian way, who wrote the *Jus Divinum Ministerii Evangelici*, as long since as the year 1654, declared, ‘ As we agree wholly in the same *confession of faith*, so we agree in many things of greatest concernment in the matters of *church-discipline*. And those things wherein we differ are not of such consequence as to cause a *schism* between us, either in *worship*, or in *love and affection*. Our debates are (as it was said of the disputes of the ancient fathers, one with another, about lesser differences) *not contentiones*, but *collationes*. We can truly say, as our brethren do in their preface, ‘ that it is far from us so to *attest the discipline* of

Christ, as to *detest* the *disciples* of Christ; so to contest for the seamless coat of Christ, as to crucify the living members of Christ; so to divide ourselves about church-communion, as, through breaches, to open a wide gap for a deluge of antichristian and profane malignity, to swallow up both church and civil state.'

" *Thirdly.* The brethren of the *Presbyterian* way in England are lately come unto such a happy union with those of the *congregational*, that all former names of distinction are now swallowed up in that blessed one, of *united brethren*. And now, partly, because one of New England, viz. Mr. Increase Mather, then resident at London, was very singularly instrumental in effecting of that union; but in more, because that union hath been for many *lustres*,—yea, many *decades* of years, exemplified in the churches of New-England."

With these facts and precedents before our eyes, we may, with some confidence, ask,—What now hinders the union of the Independents and Congregationalists in England and Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and America, with the before-named Presbyterians in these countries? How glorious an achievement would it be, to sink for ever into oblivion the separating names of Presbyterian, and Independent, and Congregationalist, (and, would to God, many others,) in the common title of *the associate*

unestablished churches,—or, some other, even less specific! But lately, the names of *Burgher* and *Anti-Burgher*, two Scottish demons of discord, have been “cast as a stone into the depths of the sea,” we hope, to rise no more! A spirit of union now breathes through the religious world in the glorious efforts made to enlighten and evangelize the nations. The principles of general communion among Christians have been most ably established, both in the old and the new world, by eminent divines, the ornament of the age. Attempts at unity have been made in some places, which, though perhaps from necessity, imperfect, and, though they have been frowned upon, or ridiculed, yet we must be allowed to hope, will grow into a mature and attractive form; and prove the precursors and guides of those who shall become convinced, like their promoters, of the duty and advantage of a close, compact association of brothers and friends.

It is not necessary that there should be one grand simultaneous movement. Let those churches which are convinced of the duty of uniting for the purposes proposed, begin the act of union; if already united, let them consider whether they are as closely united as they ought to be, or whether their union is as effective as the great Head of the Church intends. The circles of union would thus continually multiply and extend, and a most ample field

would exhibit that rare and delightful spectacle,—“the unity of the spirit, and the bond of peace.”

.. The great canon of universal christian communion, now made to appear in its native brilliance and pure simplicity, is, that *none should be excluded who appear to have embraced “the common salvation.”* Much could we wish that names, and sects, and parties, should fall; that the disciples should experience a new era in their history; and that it should be recorded of them, that, at some certain place—(in Britain rather than elsewhere,) the disciples began, *a second time*, to be called **CHRISTIANS**.

.. But even in their best estate, in this world, doubtless there would be some differences of views and practice. These might not be of sufficient importance to make a specific name necessary,—at least, not to give it any offensive and separating prominence. However, taking **Christians** as they are, and allowing them to bear their distinct names, and to practise their several peculiarities, they might, by possibility, at the same time, maintain communion with each other, and co-operate, so as to preserve that unity, which is really consistent with diversity. There must first, indeed, be “a willing mind,” and “a right spirit;” but, supposing the churches composed of accredited Christians, they might, I say, bear distinct

names, while they held communion, and enjoyed brotherly love. One might bear the title *Episcopalian*, another *Presbyterian*, a third *Independent*, or *Congregational*, a fourth *Methodist*, a fifth *Baptist*, a sixth *Moravian*, a seventh *Quaker*; and, if composed of such men as Fenelon and Leander Van Ess, an eighth might be denominated *Catholic*. Harsh and discordant as these sounds fall upon the ear, they might be made subservient to the general harmony of Christian love and sound doctrine, in all the great *essentials* of our faith.

But I confess I am only speaking hypothetically; for, so long as the passions, the prejudices, and the interests, of those who may, notwithstanding, be true Christians, shall continue to operate, such a fellowship as we have supposed is, for the most part, impracticable. These lamentable barriers to Christian unity and concord, have, however, been of late giving way; the most unlooked-for coalitions have taken place; and God, in his infinite mercy, grant that our surprise, and delight, and gratitude, at beholding these glorious revolutions in the christian world, may never have cause to subside; — never, never, may these happy changes cease, till all the family of Christ our Lord on earth, be as closely, and, if possible, as *visibly*, united in heart and soul, and lovely fellowship, as the blessed counterpart in the heavenly world!

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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ERRATA.

Page 39, line 6, for עבד, read עבד.

Page 78, line 14, for is, read it.



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